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THE POLITICAL PSYCHOLOGY OF RACE
JOHN B. JUDIS

THE CAMPAIGN HE *SHOULD* RUN
THE EDITORS

THE STUPIDITY OF DIGNITY
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HILLARY RELIVES IMPEACHMENT
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LIONEL TRILLING'S DREAM
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NICHOLSON BAKER'S SHAME
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Capture the Flag

For the past month, Barack Obama has been determined to sap the charisma from his campaign. In his quest for the elusive white working class, he has steered away from the type of oratory that once made middle-aged men act like "American Idol" fans. By remaking his stage presence—lots of nerdy detail, lots of combative rhetoric—he finally managed to bring Hillary Clinton's impressive electoral machinery to a screeching halt.

But, in the course of assuming this new political persona, he ditched one of his most potent themes. It was a theme that coursed through his best speeches, like the one he gave after winning the Iowa caucus, and it prompted genuinely stirring moments. A few minutes into his victory speech, he had just finished a refrain about people "choosing hope over fear … choosing unity over division" when, out of the crowd, there suddenly arose a chant. It was a chant that, while familiar to hockey fans and Republicans, was not one typically associated with Democrats. Obama's supporters were chanting "USA! USA!"

FIGURE: AP PHOTO/KEVORK DJANSEZIAN; BACKGROUND: AP PHOTO/CHARLIE NEIBERGALL

This patriotism was at the very core of Obama's original appeal—the undercurrent of his "one nation" speech at the 2004 convention and his "only in America" autobiographical narrative. And you can understand why it has produced such raw displays of national pride: At a time when *Newsweek* publishes covers about American decline and polling shows mass despair about the trajectory of the country, Obama's story captures the best about the dynamism and fluidity of our society. It's a shot of idealism when the conversations about our foreign policy and economy have slipped into a despairing realism.

And it's exactly the theme to which he should now return as he turns his campaign toward a Republican foe. The political calculations behind such a pivot are straightforward. The Republicans have already revealed how they will try to portray Obama. Any attacks that smack of race-baiting have the potential to backfire—which is presumably why John McCain has been so reluctant to criticize Obama for the words of his former pastor, Jeremiah Wright. So Republicans will strike a more xenophobic tone. They won't necessarily argue that Obama is actually from another country—although there will no doubt be some subterranean efforts to do so—but they will try to paint him as a cultural foreigner. That, of course, is what McCain is trying to do when he attacks Obama for his association with the former Weather Underground member Bill Ayres or for his "endorsement" from Hamas, as if it makes Obama a terrorist himself. It's not just sleaze but Obama's own negligence that has allowed his greatest political strength to become a liability.

How can Obama counter these attacks? He doesn't have a record of military service to fall back on (although, as the Frenchman John Kerry learned in 2004, sometimes not even that is enough). He's also demonstrated an admirable refusal to engage in the silly symbolism that passes for patriotism. But he does have a simple message that insulates him from any charge that he—and his values—are foreign. As he famously told the 2004 Democratic convention: "We are one people, all of us pledging allegiance to the stars and stripes, all of us defending the United States of America." The criticism launched against him by Clinton and McCain presumes America is irrevocably divided by race and culture. His campaign's central theme is opposition to that prognosis.

Conservatives, too, once appreciated Obama's message. It's a commonplace now among some liberals that the enthusiasm many conservatives displayed for Obama late last year was nothing but political posturing—an effort to diminish Clinton, who they then assumed would be the Democratic nominee. And there's no doubt that some conservatives were being disingenuous in their early Obamamania. But, at the same time, it's not difficult to see in Obama qualities that conservatives could find appealing. Although some now complain that his post-partisan rhetoric has not been matched by a post-partisan voting record, Obama has taken some notable departures from Democratic orthodoxy. On education, for instance, as Josh Patashnik outlined in these pages ("Reform School," March 26), Obama has supported test-based accountability and performance pay for teachers—two things that are anathema to the teachers' unions and that, for the sake of political expediency, Obama therefore sought to downplay in the Democratic primaries.

But, more than any policy positions, it's Obama's state of mind and unorthodox nature that has the potential to appeal to conservatives. As Douglas Kmiec, a conservative legal scholar who's an "Obamacan," wrote in endorsing the Illinois senator, "Obama and I may disagree on aspects of … important

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fundamentals [such as abortion and traditional marriage], but I am convinced, based upon his public pronouncements and his personal writing, that on each of these questions he is not closed to understanding opposing points of view and, as best as it is humanly possible, he will respect and accommodate them."

It's his ability to respect and accommodate that Obama should be able to use to great effect against McCain this November. Although McCain himself was once considered an unorthodox politician, he's largely abandoned his heterodox streak. Indeed, the facts are on Obama's side when he argues that a McCain presidency will be, in essence, a third term for the policies of George W. Bush—from Iraq to health care to, perhaps most importantly, the economy. The last issue is Obama's most obvious opening. It's not just the fact that we're headed into a recession and McCain has admitted to having a limited knowledge of economics; it's that he has shifted his position on taxation in wildly divergent directions in a relatively concentrated period of time.

This provides ample ground for attack and contrast. And Obama's opposition to the gas-tax holiday was a return to the unconventional Obama. The controversy over the gas tax shows that the press (and even the public) will reward him for standing on principle in the face of potential political damage. But it was merely a first step. And, now that Obama has apparently dispatched with Hillary Clinton, it's time for him to go back to being the candidate he was when he started his campaign—a candidate of national unity and reconciliation—because that's the candidate who can win a general election.

The Inner Tree-Hugging Gamer in You

Video-game mavens have snapped up more than six million copies of "Grand Theft Auto: IV" in its first week in stores, obliterating sales records and apparently making it the best-received interactive entertainment item in history. At first glance (and, perhaps, second and third), this might seem to have little to do with energy conservation. Success in GTA results in large measure from carjacking, robbery, and general thuggery. These tactics are not usually considered promising avenues to improving energy efficiency, though perhaps, if applied strategically to wavering members of Congress, they could hasten the passage of cap-and-trade legislation.

In any event, the principle underlying GTA's success is obvious. There are few things Americans—especially of the male variety—love more than either cars or competition, and the two in combination are a nearly unbeatable pair. Which is why we're pleased by the recent trend in the automobile industry, in which it's become increasingly common for carmakers to include fuel-efficiency gauges that display prominently the number of miles per gallon a car is getting at each instant. Toyota's Prius, among other models, comes with such a gauge, and Nissan announced last year that all new vehicles will be equipped with one. In trials, the gauge has prompted smoother and more efficient driving, which can increase fuel efficiency by 10 percent or more. Conservation, which was once, in the words of Vice President Cheney, merely a "sign of personal virtue," becomes something far more appealing: a sign of personal superiority. It would be even better if the gauges displayed one's fuel-efficiency percentile, putting Americans in direct competition with each other for gas-sipping bragging rights.

In fact, it's becoming clear that the strategy of calling the public's attention to its energy-consumption habits holds real promise for spurring more efficient living. A few years ago, Mark Martinez, manager of program development at Southern California Edison, was searching for ways to get the utility's customers to conserve electricity. He hit upon the idea of an Ambient Orb, a small globe which he programmed to glow red when electricity consumption was high (making power from the grid more expensive) and green when it was low. Within weeks, customers to whom Martinez handed out Ambient Orbs had reduced their peak-period power usage by about 40 percent, voluntarily saving both money and energy (see Richard H. Thaler and Cass R. Sunstein's recent piece, "Easy Does It," April 9).

Americans consume more energy per capita than any G-8 country besides Canada, and we don't have wicked Winnipeg winters to contend with. (We *do* have Winnipeg's hockey team, but that's another matter.) Changing this sorry state will require smarter public policy and a more reasoned debate than we've had so far. But it will also require something more—an appeal to the gamer in each of us. ◆

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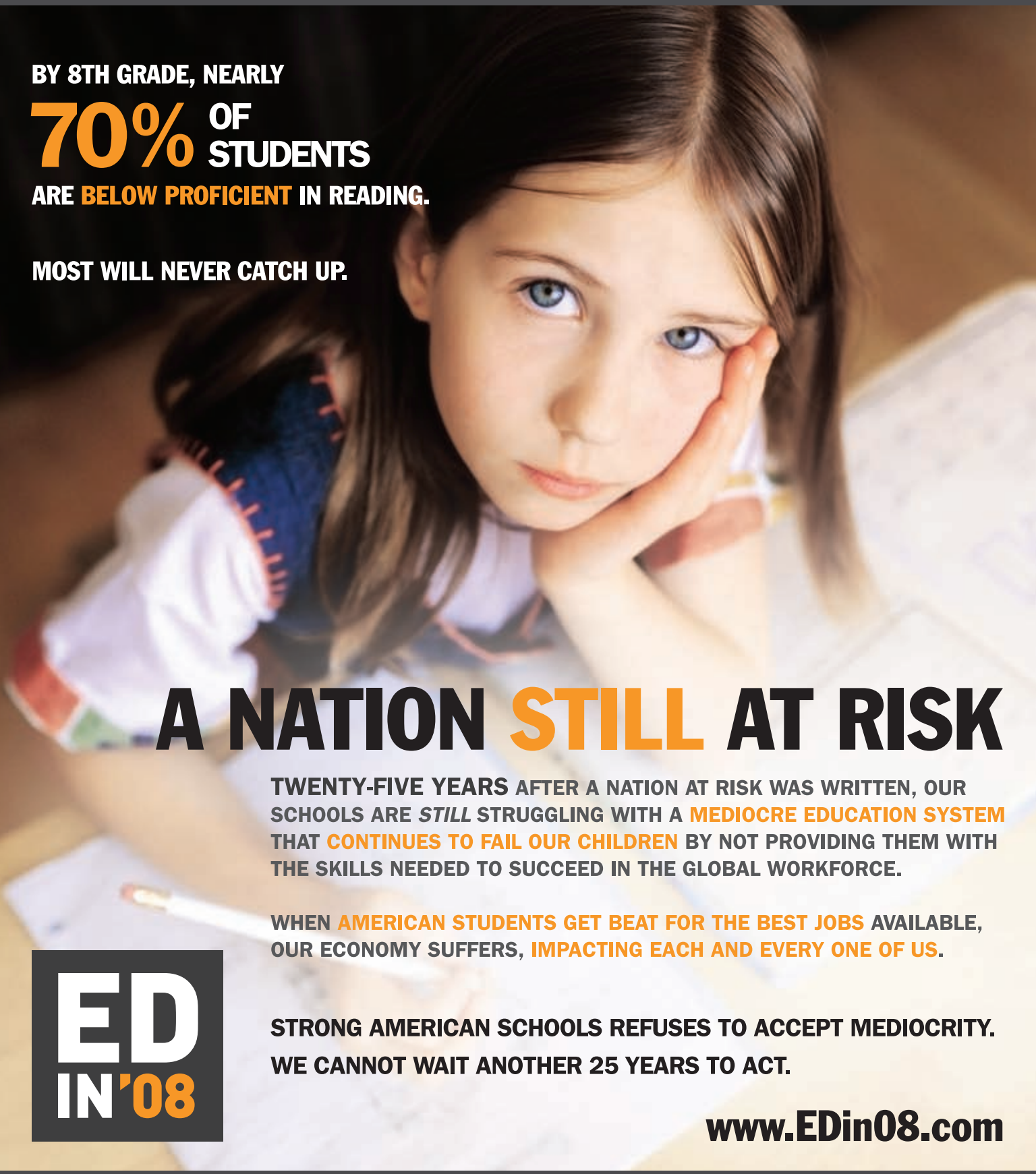

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Entanglements

Ignore what candidates say about foreign policy.

JONATHAN CHAIT

The Iraq war is the biggest issue of the presidential campaign, and, on the surface, the voters have a clear choice before them. Barack Obama says he'll bring the troops home, and John McCain insists the troops must stay until they have achieved victory. Problem is, neither of the candidates really seems to mean exactly what he says.

One of the key factors in Samantha Power's journey from Obama foreign policy adviser to ex–Obama foreign policy adviser was her casual admission, two months ago, that Obama will take new information into account when formulating his Iraq plan. "You can't make a commitment in March 2008 about what circumstances will be like in January of 2009," she said. "He will, of course, not rely on some plan that he's crafted as a presidential candidate or a U.S. senator. He will rely upon a plan—an operational plan—that he pulls together in consultation with people who are on the ground, to whom he doesn't have daily access now as a result of not being the president."

Hillary Clinton's campaign seized upon this scandalous admission to portray Obama as a phony. But several Clinton advisers told *The New York Sun* that she, too, may not follow through on her withdrawal plans. "I don't know what she would do as president," said Kenneth Pollack. "But all of my experience with her when she was First Lady is that this is a woman who would put our nation's interests first and any campaign promises a distant second." Naturally, Obama's campaign pounced.

Even steadfast, resolute McCain has quietly distanced himself from his gung-ho rhetoric. A few weeks ago, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that, according to Dmitri Simes, president of the Nixon Center, foreign policy "realists" in the Republican Party met with McCain and came away reassured that he is not the die-hard hawk he portrays himself to be.

Obviously, campaign rhetoric of all kinds offers an imperfect guide to how a candidate will govern. But it's particularly true of foreign policy rhetoric. Why is it so hard to vote on foreign policy? A president's foreign policy tends to get driven by new developments overseas. Any number of things could happen between now and January that would persuade McCain to pull troops out of Iraq, or persuade Obama to leave them there. But dramatic, mind-changing data about health care or the minimum wage is not likely to pop up.

Domestic policy debates tend to run along well-worn partisan grooves, with entrenched interest groups on each side. Although it has become less so in recent years, foreign policy is far more ideologically fluid. Nobody could have predicted during their candidacies that George W. Bush would embrace nation-building in the Middle East, that Bill Clinton would finish his presidency as an advocate of humanitarian intervention, or that Ronald Reagan would sign a sweeping arms control pact with the Soviet Union.

This particular election seems to have an unusually strong incentive to take hard-and-fast positions, especially on the central issue of Iraq. If any candidates came out and said what they're whispering in private—they'll consider events on the ground in Iraq when they win office and make their judgment accordingly—they'd end up looking ridiculous. Suppose you favored withdrawal when Iraq was disintegrating a year and a half ago, then reconsidered when violence declined, and then edged back toward withdrawal following the recent intra-Shia violence. Analytically, it would make perfect sense. Politically, it would be a disaster.

Four years ago, poor John Kerry tried to explain that he was for the war given what he knew at the time, against it knowing what we know today, but in favor of its continued prosecution given that we were already there. It didn't end well for him. The lesson the candidates have taken away from this episode is that you need a consistent, easy-to-explain position or else you'll come across as a flip-flopper. Foreign policy has become a character issue, with nuance understood as a sign of weakness.

And, so, McCain has crafted an image filled with nationalistic bluster. One of his advertisements juxtaposes the Arizona senator—"Do not yield. Do not flinch. Stand up. We're Americans. And we'll never surrender. They will"—with Winston Churchill delivering his famous "We shall never surrender" address. Fighting on at any cost is, of course, the proper response when the alternative is occupation by Nazi Germany. I do not mean to minimize the costs of withdrawal from Iraq when I say that they would be considerably less dire than having the United States invaded and occupied by a genocidal totalitarian conqueror.

Indeed, on the subject of his own country's war in Iraq, Churchill struck a less than Churchillian tone. "There is something very sinister to my mind in this mesopotamian entanglement," Churchill wrote in 1920. "Week after week and month after month for a long time we shall have a continuance of this miserable, wasteful, sporadic warfare marked from time to time certainly by minor disasters and cuttings off of troops and agents, and very possibly attended by some very grave occurrence."

Does McCain actually believe we must achieve victory in Iraq at all costs? He certainly didn't believe that about Lebanon in 1983 or Somalia a decade later, forcefully advocating withdrawal in both cases. But "We're Americans. And we'll never surrender" sounds a lot better than "We're Americans. And we rarely surrender, except when the costs of fighting on outweigh the potential for success."

Obama, as Michael Crowley explained in the previous issue, understands that events could change his plans (see "Barack in Iraq," May 7). But he also grasps that the risks of appearing indecisive outweigh the risks of appearing too dovish, which is why he so quickly disowned Power's remarks. Republicans have arrived at the same conclusion. A reliable barometer of the GOP's calculations is the writing of Peter Wehner, who recently left his post in the Bush administration as director of strategic initiatives, a position that roughly translates to "minister of propaganda." In a long *Commentary* article, Wehner detailed Obama's record of statements on Iraq, from opposing the war at the outset, to favoring its prosecution once we were in, to finally favoring withdrawal in the fall of 2006. Wehner sneeringly described this as "a record of problematically ad-hoc judgments at best, calculatingly cynical judgments at worst." My God: He's tailoring his position to fit … changing circumstances! In the Bush administration, this kind of flexibility would never be tolerated. ◆

TRB
From Washington

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The Mall

Cruel Intentions

Is Obama cynical enough?

Barack Obama doesn't express anger like the rest of us. He becomes cold and distant, rather than hot and strident. He over-enunciates and clips the final word of each sentence. Such was his posture on April 29, when Obama held a press conference to denounce the latest rantings of his ex-pastor, Jeremiah Wright. To the reporters who follow him from stop to stop, Obama was "seething" and "clearly upset." But, to the folks watching at home, Obama may as well have been leading a seminar on contract arbitration. A mere 30 percent of voters thought Obama was genuinely outraged, according to one poll. Fifty-eight percent said he'd denounced Wright out of political calculation.

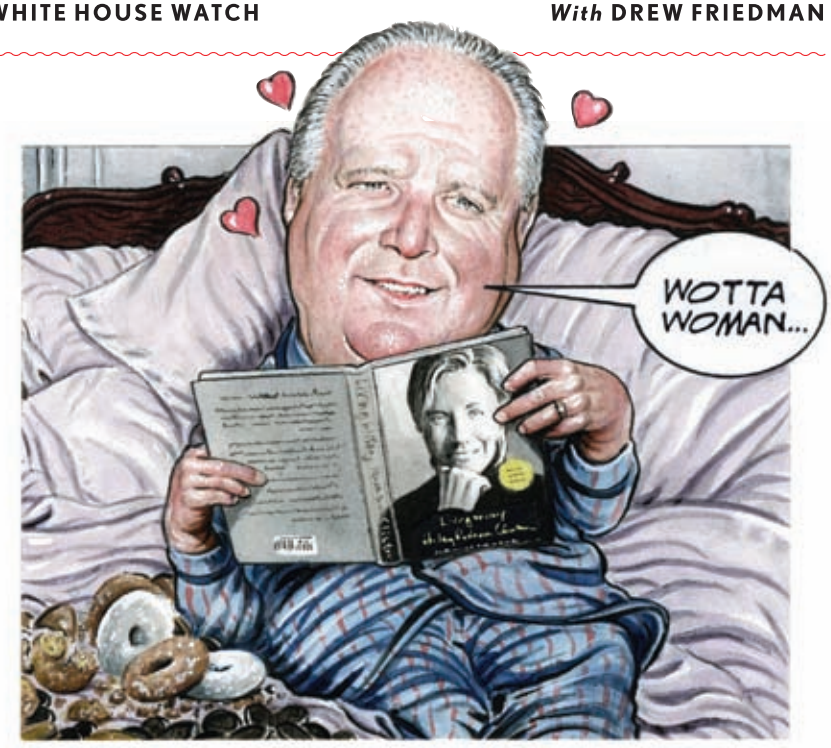
The irony, of course, is that the reason Obama found himself in this mess was that he hadn't been calculating enough. Had he repudiated Wright back in March, when the reverend first entered the public consciousness, it hardly would have mattered what manner of deranged musing Wright later conjured up. But Obama had refused to cut the cord, and Wright wrapped it around his windpipe. On "Meet the Press" that Sunday, Obama sounded like a man who'd endured a million "I told you so"s. "It's always good to pull the Band-Aid off quick," he conceded when asked what he'd learned.

After eight years of the Clintons and eight more of Karl Rove, there's no doubt Obama's queasiness on matters of political expediency holds a certain appeal. "The politically correct, in quotes, thing to do would be to throw the guy off the boat the first chance you had," says one Obama confidant. "No one doubts Hillary would have done that." He did not mean this as a compliment. On the other hand, there's clearly some amount of cynicism, calculation, and ruthlessness that's required of any successful candidate. Which makes it worth asking: How much of these qualities does Barack Obama possess—and is it enough?

In the Clinton campaign's telling, Obama is hardly the Bambi-like figure his supporters imagine. To the Clintonites, the only thing more galling than Team Obama's portrayal of Hillary as someone who will "say anything to get elected" is the rank hypocrisy of the exercise. On practically every conference call they host, Clinton communications director Howard Wolfson and his deputy, Phil Singer, marvel at the chutzpah of someone purporting to change politics while running such and such an ad or sending out such and such a mailer. That they say this in practically the same breath that they bash Obama as an out-of-touch elitist doesn't make it untrue.

Privately, even loyalists concede Obama is more than willing to be ruthless. They often do so with a tinge of pride and satisfaction. "Just ask that lady he bumped off the ballot," says one campaign official when I bring up Obama's alleged softness. "That lady" would be former Illinois state senator Alice Palmer. In 1995, Palmer decided to run for an open congressional seat and all but proclaimed Obama her heir apparent. But, after losing the primary, Palmer wanted to stick with her old job. Obama wouldn't budge. For good measure, he challenged the petitions she'd filed to run for reelection, alleging that many of her signatures were flawed. Palmer withdrew, and Obama eventually waltzed into office unopposed.

WHITE HOUSE WATCH *With* **DREW FRIEDMAN**



Rush Limbaugh discovers his true feelings for Hillary Clinton.

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It wasn't an anomaly. While running for U.S. Senate eight years later, Obama's campaign prepared another hard-nosed challenge—this time against a woman named Joyce Washington. The Obama camp worried that Washington, an African American who had mounted a strong primary campaign for lieutenant governor two years earlier, would threaten his chances in a seven-candidate field. The campaign spent dozens of man-hours scrutinizing Washington's signatures before eventually deciding that the risks outweighed the benefits. "We figured he might take heat because he did it once before," recalls an aide involved. (The campaign denies that this happened.)

And yet, as ruthless as Obama has been at times, there are lines he's refused to cross. Back in 2003, Obama's pollster Paul Harstad discerned that running as "Barack" rather than "Barry"—the candidate's childhood name—could cost Obama precious votes. "There was a poll," recalls Harstad. "We were trying to figure out how much resistance there was to the name 'Barack Obama.' And there was some resistance." Harstad told Obama he could get away with one weird name, but two would be a stretch. "I very distinctly remember him saying on that call: 'I'm Barack Obama. I may have been raised Barry Obama, but I'm Barack Obama.' … He wouldn't think of changing it."

Obama has tended to shun similar stunts when they relate to race. The run-up to South Carolina was rife with talk that post-racial Obama was morphing into a decidedly pre-post-racial candidate. To reverse the slide, blogger Mickey Kaus suggested he give a speech embracing class- rather than race-based affirmative action, something Obama had flirted with in the past. Kaus had a point: The atmospherics would have been irresistible to ambivalent whites. I pushed a milder form of the idea on my own blog. Not long after, I got a response from an Obama adviser: Never gonna happen. Urging Sister Souljah politicking on him was the surest way to provoke a scowl.

The affirmative-action-speech-that-wasn't points to a broader m.o.: The more a gesture looks like a direct response to political circumstances, the less keen Obama is. Take the recent gas-tax debate. It's not that Obama would never contemplate pandering, even on an issue economists regard as bogus. In 2000, he voted for a similar measure in the Illinois state Senate. It's the particular form of pander that so overtly responds to a throbbing political need—courting working-class voters in North Carolina and Indiana, in this case—that he resists. Pete Giangreco, a senior Obama strategist, recalls a similar situation last summer. At the time, Obama had stalled out in the polls, and a number of candidates were outflanking him on the war. Major donors and Iowa supporters were pressing him to call for an immediate and complete withdrawal. Some aides wondered where Obama's votes would come from if he stuck to his more cautious position. "There was definitely a conversation—maybe we should do this, roll the dice, be more aggressive," recalls Giangreco. "But it got shut down" by Obama.

For Obama, these decisions typically boil down to three considerations. First, such pandering genuinely offends his sensibilities. Obama was pretty much untempted amid all the prodding on the war, says Giangreco. "It constantly came up. He was simply not going to change his position." The second, related consideration is that Obama believes this sort of crassness is simply unnecessary for someone of his rhetorical gifts. He has a serene confidence that he can win over people on both sides of an issue, whereas a lesser pol must slavishly follow majority opinion. "He is so good at having it both ways, so damn good," says one former aide. "It's standard Barack procedure."

Finally, there's the matter of the meta-narrative Obama has constructed. Simply put, it's hard to sell yourself as a non-politician while behaving in obviously political ways. "He has gone out of his way to communicate that he is going about this differently," says Mike Feldman, a former aide to Al Gore. "I'm sure there are times when he has to alter his tactics to be consistent with that promise." This can sound more cynical than it is. Deciding to market yourself as a "different kind of politician" imposes real constraints. No one would voluntarily accept those constraints unless they were comfortable abiding by them.

The logic of all three considerations plainly converged during the Wright fiasco. Back in March, breaking with Wright struck Obama as a cheap political move, even if, in retrospect, it was the prudent course. "[L]ife's messy sometimes, and … things don't proceed in textbook Political 101 fashion," he reflected to Tim Russert. In any case, Obama figured he could solve the problem with his trademark speechifying. "That speech had it both ways: Keep Wright, make everybody happy," says the former aide. But, even if he'd opted for the high-percentage play, it wouldn't necessarily have worked. The fact that unloading on Wright was a political no-brainer made it risky for the guy who transcends politics.

Few will fault Obama's instincts after his May 6 triumph. The college-educated voters Wright did his best to scare off came home to Obama in the end. Still, it's hard not to feel as though the whole Obama project is an absurdly delicate ecosystem, in which a slight shift in the mix of politics and principle could lead to mass extinction. Given the disinformation campaign the GOP is surely plotting, there may be times this fall when a cheap stunt is exactly what the moment demands.

Noam Scheiber

The Groveler

Mitt Romney's shameless quest for v.p.

Has ever a politician gone so cheerfully into defeat as Mitt Romney? Remember Romney around the time of the Michigan and Florida GOP primaries: As he derided John McCain's economic policies as defeatist and lashed out at the senator for dishonestly distorting his rhetoric on Iraq, Romney appeared to be a man barely in control of an immense, quivering, anti-McCain outrage. (McCain repaid him by comparing him to a pig.)

But it took only a week after admitting defeat at the Conservative Political Action Conference in early February for Romney to declare that, "in the thick of the fight, it's easy to lose sight of your opponent's finer qualities. But the truth of the matter is that, in the case of Senator McCain, I could never quite do that."

And he didn't stop at a mere endorsement. He hit the road with McCain in Utah and Colorado, posed guffawing with him while snacking on turkey sandwiches in the back of McCain's plane, pledged to raise him $15 million (more than McCain currently has in the bank), and gushed, and gushed, and gushed. In the course of telling Sean Hannity last month that he would be "honored" to be McCain's vice president, Romney opined that, "when it comes to national security, John McCain is the big dog, and each of them [Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama] are the Chihuahua."

ANTHONY RUSSO

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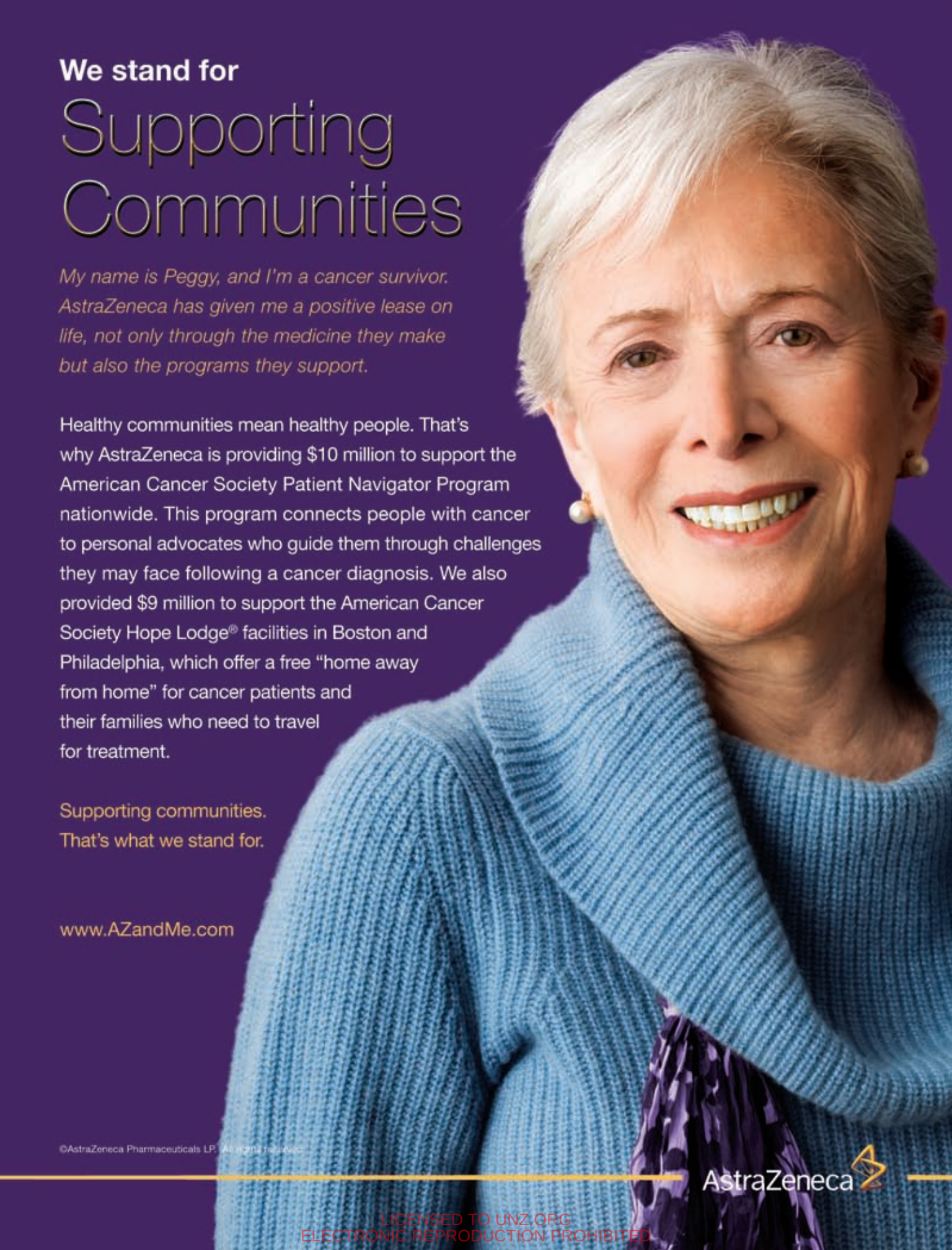
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Like China's Last Emperor happily agreeing to reign over a puppet state in Manchuria after being deposed by the Japanese, Romney is presiding over various local—and less desirable—Republican events on McCain's behalf: a county Republican dinner in Amish country, Pennsylvania; the Nevada GOP convention (which was hijacked by Ron Paul supporters); and, last weekend, the Maine GOP convention at the vaguely decrepit Civic Center in Augusta. There, a press avail in a remote upstairs corner of the convention hall yields the last, shrunken fruits of the Romney campaign's publicity harvest: among them one TV camera; a bored-to-the-point-of-angry-looking Associated Press drudge wearing a dirty T-shirt and four days' stubble; and a freelance film critic in owlish glasses who declares that his "passion is for the cinema." "Governor," the film critic asks, "is there a favorite political movie of yours that you think gets at the intersection of things political and things artistic?"

Romney stalls, beaming a smile out from under a fresh coffee-brown tan. "Certain movies have had an influence. … *The Manchurian Candidate* …" Finally, the gears deliver up the only thing on the mental production line these days: a way to praise John McCain. "That movie with Robert Redford, *The Candidate*," Romney finishes. "Where he is over-promoted and over-packaged, and that's quite frightening. That's what we won't get with John McCain. Nobody has a question whether John McCain is the real deal."

There is a damp, awkward pause. It's as though Romney has acknowledged his own deepest failing: He was over-promoted and over-packaged and, frankly, it sometimes was quite frightening. It could be a sad moment, except that Romney grins sunnily and swivels to bat the next question. Anything, nowadays, to help the big dog.

To hear Romney aides describe it, the core members of Team Mitt were as thrilled to hop aboard the McCain ship as their leader was. When they gathered at headquarters in Boston on the Thursday after Romney dropped out, there were "zero dissenters," relates one former Romney adviser. "We all agreed we had to do a formal endorsement." So campaign manager Beth Myers called McCain campaign manager Rick Davis and told him Romney was McCain's for the taking. "'Anytime, anywhere, Mitt'll do it—or not!'" the adviser recalls Myers as saying. McCain happened to be in Rhode Island that day, so Davis just pointed the Straight Talk Express north and got the thing done that very afternoon.

Soon after, top Romney backer Meg Whitman signed up to co-chair McCain's campaign and Romney dispatched finance man Spencer Zwick, the 29-year-old wunderkind Romney calls his "sixth son," to be a liaison between McCain's and Romney's money people. In the weeks after the endorsement, some Romney backers even took pleasure in the way McCain, whom the papers had reported disliked Romney, appeared to warm up to him. "Mitt has got a great sense of humor. I think it surprised McCain," says another Romney associate, sounding more like a proud parent than a seasoned campaign hand.

Resistance still simmers in outer provinces of the old Romney empire. "I think the burden is on the McCain campaign to reach out and harvest [the Romney] enthusiasm," warns Mark DeMoss, a conservative Romney fund-raiser who hasn't yet contributed to McCain—and who says he knows Romney fund-raisers who categorically won't open their wallets unless Mitt is added to the ticket. "It would be a huge mistake to take us for granted," he says.

Other Romney fund-raisers are griping that team McCain hasn't seemed that interested in *them*. Mitt's biggest fund-raiser, L.A. investor Tom Tellefsen, told the *Los Angeles Times* in April that the McCain campaign had not attempted to make any communication with him at all. And, in the end, there will be a structural limit to what Romney can offer McCain, at least financially. Romney, like Mike Huckabee and Obama, cultivated a set of hardcore supporters who hadn't dabbled much in politics before, and some of them only have eyes for Mitt. "Mitt-world," the former Romney adviser explains, comprised several distinct groups. "There's the old Michigan money. The Harvard group. The business folks. … The Olympics people. Being the governor of Massachusetts got him a lot of donors. Lastly, the Mormon thing. He had layers to Mitt-world, a lot of them very unique."

Perhaps sensing its toadying-to-usefulness ratio was not in appropriate proportion—the blogs had a field day with the "big dog" thing—the Romney camp now seems to be backpedaling. The $15 million he promised McCain? "I don't know how much it will be," Romney's spokesman, Eric Fehrnstrom, tells me, pivoting, "not only are we raising money for McCain, but also for the [Republican National Committee's] Victory Committee." The vice-presidential

Lou Beach

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hopes? "He's *not* applying for the job, he's *not* campaigning for it," says Fehrnstrom, stressing the governor's excitement about starting a PAC to help all Republican candidates. The message: I'm not personally ambitious, I'm just the quintessential loyal party man. When a reporter at the Augusta Civic Center asked Romney whether he would like to be McCain's v.p., Romney chuckled, "I don't think that's very likely."

Saying it's not likely, of course, is a highly choreographed step in the running-mate dance. And denying that Mitt Romney would like to be vice president is like pretending the boy who filled the girl's car with 700 roses during prom season just did it because he happens to be a nice guy.

But, ironically, it could be Romney's extreme enthusiasm that inoculates him against disappointment or bitterness if he isn't chosen. That's because Romney has plenty of ambition, but apparently none of that trait that normally goes with it: pride. It's not hard to imagine him carrying on in the same fashion even if rejected, trekking to Nevada and Maine and refashioning questions about film into odes to McCain's authenticity. It's the peculiar dutifulness of the Romney ethos at work, exhibited first in his willingness to take any position to please the base, then in his chipper eagerness to endorse, and now in the race for v.p.: Anytime, anywhere, Mitt'll do it—or not.

Eve Fairbanks

Paper Shredder

Does Murdoch know what he's doing to the Journal?

Shortly after nine in the morning on April 28, about two dozen reporters and editors in *The Wall Street Journal*'s Washington bureau assembled for the weekly staff meeting led by the D.C. bureau chief, John Bussey. Seated on couches in the bureau's wood-paneled parlor, the staffers waited to begin a conference call with Robert Thomson, the *Journal*'s publisher.

The mood was uncomfortable. Only a week had passed since the paper's managing editor, Marcus Brauchli, had resigned under pressure from Rupert Murdoch, chairman of the *Journal*'s corporate parent, News Corp. Brauchli's decision to accept millions of dollars in return for signing a non-disclosure agreement had triggered paroxysms of anger inside the *Journal* newsroom. "We're a business newspaper, so we know a sell-out when we see one," one angry *Journal* staffer told me.

With Brauchli's ouster, Thomson, who was appointed by Murdoch in December 2007, is now acting as both publisher and de facto managing editor, at least until Murdoch selects a replacement. The conference call, along with nearly a dozen similar meetings with *Journal* employees that week, was part of an effort to communicate to the editorial staff Murdoch's unfolding plans for the paper.

Since News Corp. completed the $5 billion takeover of the paper last year, Murdoch has signaled his desire for the *Journal* to be a conservative paper of record to rival *The New York Times*, hoping to serve business-minded readers who want a single source of news, be it the meltdown at Bear Stearns, floods in the Midwest, or a car bombing in Baghdad. On the call, according to staffers who participated, Thomson reiterated his and Murdoch's interest in international and political coverage and praised a page-one piece about Bill Clinton's increasing presence on the campaign trail, which ran in April, as the type of story he likes.

But many *Journal* staffers remain confused over where Murdoch is taking the paper and whether, as a business proposition, a *Journal* that tries to be all things to all people will risk ceding finance-focused readers to the resurgent *Financial Times* or even the invigorated business section in *The New York Times*. As one *Journal* staffer puts it: "The only question people were really interested in is, '*What the fuck is going on*?'"

In recent weeks, a rough portrait of Murdoch's *Journal* has emerged. According to staffers who attended Thomson's presentations, he explained that Murdoch wants the *Journal* to carry more news, shorter stories, snappier headlines, and increasing political and general-interest coverage (Thomson recently added four pages for international stories to the paper's front section). In late April, for example, the paper ran a pair of news stories on the Mississippi River floods, which one staffer notes would have been uncommon just months ago. When Murdoch made a surprise visit to the *Journal*'s D.C. bureau on March 7, he told staffers that the paper should cover non-business stories like the Virginia Tech shooting or the Minneapolis bridge collapse. Recently, to augment its general-assignment reporting muscle, the *Journal* poached *Los Angeles Times* reporter Stephanie Simon and *New York Times* reporter Leslie Eaton. In a meeting with the Weekend *Journal* staff on April 25, Thomson also discussed the idea of tapping marquee writers, such as Ian Buruma, to write long essays for the paper's Saturday edition.

Murdoch has taken a keen interest in the Washington bureau. Already, the bureau has added two additional staffers, hiring Susan Schmidt and Elizabeth Williamson from *The Washington Post*. And, one week in April, the *Journal*'s veteran political reporter Jackie Calmes scored three front-page bylines, a feat she says she had never before accomplished in her 18-year career at the paper. "At the *Journal*, the politics coverage was always the stepchild," Calmes says. "Now I feel, for the first time, that I'm part of the core coverage."

But the push for more spot news has left many staffers concerned over the fate of the *Journal*'s signature front-page features, which are often investigative pieces running more than 2,000 words. In the past, reporters often spent days crafting story memos and shaping story ideas even before presenting them to editors. But, in the conference call with the D.C. bureau on April 28, Thomson signaled that story memos shouldn't run longer than 400 words, leaving some to surmise he's less interested in long-form narrative. During another telephone exchange with the *Journal*'s bureau chiefs the next day, Thomson dismissed speculation that Murdoch was planning to kill the "A-Hed," the quirky human-interest columns that have covered topics from the difficulty of spelling the word "millennium" (during the Y2K craze) to feuding hair salons in

(continued on page 14)

Kevin Sprouls

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Does science make belief in God obsolete?

Yes, if by...

"science" we mean the entire enterprise of secular reason and knowledge (including history and philosophy), not just people with test tubes and white lab coats.

Traditionally, a belief in God was attractive because it promised to explain the deepest puzzles about origins. Where did the world come from? What is the basis of life? How can the mind arise from the body? Why should anyone be moral?

Yet over the millennia, there has been an inexorable trend: the deeper we probe these questions, and the more we learn about the world in which we live, the less reason there is to believe in God...

CONTINUED ONLINE.

Steven Pinker is the Johnstone Family Professor in the department of psychology at Harvard University. He is the author of seven books, including The Language Instinct, How the Mind Works, The Blank Slate, *and most recently,* The Stuff of Thought: Language as a Window into Human Nature.

No.

Despite the fact that I'm an atheist, I recognize that belief offers something that science does not.

Science isn't remotely about a scientist announcing truths or The Truth. It's about stating things with a certain degree of certainty. A scientist will say, "In this experiment, I observed that A causes B; it didn't happen every single time, and

my statistical analyses show that I can be X percent certain that this A/B connection didn't happen by chance." The convention in most scientific papers is that you don't report something until you're more than 95 percent certain. It is impossible with statistics to state something with 100 percent certainty...

CONTINUED ONLINE.

Robert Sapolsky is John A. and Cynthia Fry Gunn Professor of Biological Sciences and professor of neurology and neurological sciences at Stanford University. He is the author of Why Zebras Don't Get Ulcers, The Trouble with Testosterone, *and* A Primate's Memoir.

Absolutely not!

Now that we have scientific explanations for the natural phenomena that mystified our ancestors, many scientists and non-scientists believe that we no longer need to appeal to a supernatural God for explanations of anything, thereby making God obsolete. As for people of faith, many of them

believe that science, by offering such explanations, opposes their understanding that the universe is the loving and purposeful creation of God. Because science denies this fundamental belief, they conclude that science is mistaken. These very different points of view share a common conviction: that science and religion are irreconcilable enemies. They are not....

CONTINUED ONLINE.

William D. Phillips, a Nobel Laureate in physics, is a fellow of the Joint Quantum Institute of the University of Maryland and the National Institute of Standards and Technology.

It depends.

The answer turns on whether one emphasizes *belief* or *God*. Science does not make belief in God obsolete, but it may make obsolete the reality of God, depending on how far we are able to push the science.

On the question of belief in God, the answer is clearly *no*. Surveys conducted in 1916 and again in 1997 found that 40 percent of American scientists

said they believe in God, so obviously the practice of science does not make belief in God obsolete for this sizable group. Neither does it for the hundreds of millions of practicing Protestants, Catholics, Jews, and members of other faiths who both believe in God and fully embrace science. Even on one of the most contentious issues in all of science—evolution—a 2005 Pew Research Center poll found that 68 percent of Protestants and 69 percent of Catholics accept the theory...

CONTINUED ONLINE.

Michael Shermer is the publisher of Skeptic *magazine (www.skeptic.com), a monthly columnist for* Scientific American *(www.michaelshermer.com), a professor at Claremont Graduate University, and the author of* How We Believe, Why Darwin Matters, *and* The Mind of the Market.

Not necessarily.

But you must find a science-friendly, science-compatible God. First, try the pantheon of available Creators. Inspect thoroughly. If none fits the bill, invent one.

The God of your choice must be a stickler for divine principles. Science does not take kindly to a deity who, if piqued or euphoric, sets aside seismological or cosmological principles and causes the moon to shiver, the earth to split asunder, or the universe to suddenly reverse its expansion. This God must, among other things, be stoically indifferent to supplications for changing local meteorological conditions, the task having already been assigned to the discipline of fluid dynamics. Therefore, indigenous peoples, even if they dance with great energy around totem poles, shall not cause even a drop of rain to fall on parched soil. Your rule-abiding and science-

respecting God equally well dispenses with tearful Christians singing the Book of Job, pious Hindus feverishly reciting the *havan yajna*, or earnest Muslims performing the *salat-i-istisqa* as they face the Holy Ka'aba. The equations of fluid flow, not the number of

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earnest supplicants or quality of their prayers, determine weather outcomes…

CONTINUED ONLINE.

Pervez Amirali Hoodbhoy is chairman of the department of physics at Quaid-e-Azam University in Islamabad, Pakistan, and is the author of Islam and Science: Religious Orthodoxy and the Battle for Rationality.

No, not at all.

As a physician and researcher, I employ science to decipher human biology and treat disease. As a person of faith, I look to my religious tradition for the touchstones of a moral life. Neither science nor faith need contradict the other; in fact, if one appreciates the essence of each, they can enrich each other in a person's life.

So, the question of obsolescence is miscast, because science and faith should exist in

separate realms. Science uses logic and experimental methods to measure and describe the material world. It yields knowledge about the workings of molecules and machines, mitosis and momentum. Science has no moral valence. It is neutral. DNA technology can craft a cure for a cancer or produce a weapon of bioterrorism. It is only a person's application of science that takes on a moral dimension.

In that light, an atheist creates his or her own moral precepts in the absence of God. A believer looks to religious texts for guidance in what is right and what is wrong. Right and wrong, for both, do not come from physics or chemistry or biology…

CONTINUED ONLINE.

Jerome Groopman is the Recanati Professor of Medicine at Harvard and author of How Doctors Think.

Of course not.

Science itself does not contradict the hypothesis of God. Rather, it gives us a window on a dynamic and creative universe that expands our appreciation of the Divine in ways that could not have been imagined in ages past.

As an outspoken defender of evolution, I am often challenged by those who assume that if science can demonstrate the natural origins of our species, which it surely has, then God should be abandoned. But the Deity they reject so easily is not the one I know. To be threatened by science, God

would have to be nothing more than a placeholder for human ignorance. This is the God of the creationists, of the "intelligent design" movement, of those who seek their God in darkness. What we have not found and do not yet understand becomes their best—indeed their only—evidence for faith…

CONTINUED ONLINE.

Kenneth R. Miller is a professor of biology at Brown University and the author of Finding Darwin's God: A Scientist's Search for Common Ground between God and Evolution *and of* Only a Theory: Evolution and the Battle for America's Soul.

No, but only if…

we continue to develop new notions of God, such as a fully natural God that is the creativity in the cosmos.

Humans have been worshipping gods for thousands of years. Our sense of God in the Western world has evolved from Abraham's jealous God Yahweh to the God of love of the New Testament. Science and faith have split modern societies just as some form of global civilization is emerging. One result is a retreat into religious fundamentalisms, often bitterly hostile. The schism between science and religion can be healed, but it will require a slow evolution from a supernatural, theistic God to a new sense of a fully natural God as our chosen symbol for the ceaseless creativity in the natural universe…

CONTINUED ONLINE.

Stuart Kauffman is the director of the Institute for Biocomplexity and Informatics at the University of Calgary and an external professor at the Santa Fe Institute. His most recent book is Reinventing the Sacred: A New View of Science, Reason, and Religion.

No, but it should.

Until about 1832, when it first seems to have become established as a noun and a concept, the term "scientist" had no really independent meaning. "Science" meant "knowledge" in much the same way as "physic" meant medicine, and those who conducted experiments or organized field expeditions or managed laboratories were known as "natural philosophers." To these gentlemen (for they were mainly gentlemen) the belief in a divine presence or inspiration was often merely assumed to be a part of the natural order, in

rather the same way as it was assumed—or actually insisted upon—that a teacher at Cambridge University swear an oath to be an ordained Christian minister. For Sir Isaac Newton—an enthusiastic alchemist, a despiser of the doctrine of the Trinity, and a fanatical anti-Papist—the main clues to the cosmos were to be found in Scripture. Joseph Priestley, discoverer of oxygen, was a devout Unitarian as well as a believer in the phlogiston theory…

CONTINUED ONLINE.

Christopher Hitchens is the author of God Is Not Great *and the editor of* The Portable Atheist.

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Detroit. In response to a question about how far along Murdoch was in his campaign to reinvent the *Journal*, Thomson said, "we're a six to seven on a scale of ten," according to one participant on the call.

Thomson has also raised the specter that there would soon be a restructuring of the editing ranks. "They want a much more reporter-driven paper," one staffer says. Historically, the *Journal* has stood apart for its ranks of editors and bureau chiefs, who closely supervised teams of reporters and shepherded copy up the chain of command to New York. While Thomson didn't provide a specific number, *Journal* staffers speculate that as many as 40 to 60 editors could be laid off or reassigned. A Dow Jones spokesperson declined to comment.

Thomson has dealt with newsroom upheaval before. In March 2002, Murdoch appointed him to run the *Times* of London, where he refashioned the 217-year-old broadsheet into a hard-charging tabloid. A native Australian like Murdoch, Thomson can be disdainful of critiques from the journalistic establishment.

But he's also appeared to show disdain for the paper he's manning now. After Murdoch named the 47-year-old publisher of the *Journal* in December, some staffers sensed that Thomson approached the job not with respect for the institution but with a kind of condescension and a relish for changing it. "It seems as if he has a grudge against the *Journal*. He tried to take us down a notch," one staffer says, recounting an April 28 meeting Thomson held with the staff of the Money and Investing section.

In his call with the bureau chiefs on April 29, Thomson said that Murdoch intends to announce a new managing editor within weeks, not months. Thomson has told staffers that he wants a "renaissance man" and a reporter with extensive overseas experience. *Journal* staffers say that the leading internal candidates are D.C. bureau chief Bussey, Money and Investing editor Nick Deogun, and assistant managing editor Alan Murray.

Many staffers believe Murdoch will look externally to fill the top newsroom slot. Last month, *Gawker* floated the idea that *New York Times* mergers and acquisitions reporter Andrew Ross Sorkin is a possible candidate. Many *Journal* staffers dismiss the rumor, and the source of the idea turns out to be *Vanity Fair* media columnist Michael Wolff, who is writing a book about Murdoch and the *Journal*. (Wolff confirms that he had heard the tip "from a couple of people" and passed it on.)

Still, whenever the announcement is made, staffers understand where power resides in the newsroom. "No matter who is chosen," one staffer says, "it's likely Thomson will be pulling the strings."

Gabriel Sherman

Street Cred?

Who does the new Israel lobby really represent?

Consider the plight of the American Jewish peacenik. With Hamas in control of Gaza, Ehud Olmert under investigation, and the West Bank government of Mahmoud Abbas shaky as ever, a negotiated deal between Israelis and Palestinians doesn't exactly appear imminent. Meanwhile, closer to home, the likely Democratic nominee, Barack Obama, has said he won't negotiate with Hamas. Under these grim circumstances, what's a Peace Now type to do?

Enter J Street, a new lobbying group and political action committee that says it will represent the interests of liberal American Jews. The organization derives its name from the fact that Washington's road system, in which horizontal streets are named after letters of the alphabet, contains no J Street—the grid goes directly from I to K. Just as there is no J Street on the city's map, the group's founders maintain that the perspectives of liberal Jews are not adequately represented among Washington's pro-Israel lobbyists. "It is time for the broad, sensible mainstream of pro-Israel American Jews and their allies to challenge those on the extreme right who claim to speak for all American Jews in the national debate about Israel and the Middle East—and who, through the use of fear and intimidation, have cut off reasonable debate on the topic," declared J Street founder and former Clinton administration official Jeremy Ben-Ami in a recent piece for *The Forward*. The group, according to its website, favors "diplomatic solutions over military ones, including in Iran; multilateral over unilateral approaches to conflict resolution; and dialogue over confrontation with a wide range of countries and actors when conflicts do arise." Perhaps most controversially, its founder favors negotiating with Hamas. "Should there be attempts to engage Hamas and to find dialogue with them? Yes," Ben-Ami said last month. One of the other brains behind the group, Daniel Levy, a British-born Israeli citizen and former adviser to Knesset member Yossi Beilin of the left-wing Meretz Party, has been a vociferous advocate of negotiating with the terrorist group.

The genesis of J Street lies in the allegedly right-wing agenda of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC)—king of pro-Israel lobbies with 100,000 members and an annual operating budget of $60 million. "I'm not with AIPAC; I do not support AIPAC," prominent New York lawyer and J Street Advisory Council member Victor Kovner said in a press conference call last month. (Other members of the council include Robert Malley, a former Clinton administration peace negotiator who has defended Yasser Arafat's rejection of Clinton's 2000 Camp David peace proposal; Moveon.org founder Eli Pariser; and journalist Eric Alterman.)

J Street's founders are right about one thing: AIPAC is hardly a perfect organization. There are obvious downsides to its reluctance to criticize Israeli settlement construction—a policy at odds with a long-term solution to the conflict—and its relationship with members of the Christian right is sometimes too close for comfort. Indeed, if J Street were merely an organization that took a posture similar to AIPAC's on most issues—supporting U.S. military aid to Israel, lobbying for energy and security cooperation between the two countries, backing legislation that isolates rogue regimes like Iran and Syria—but criticized the settlements and scorned alliances of convenience with the likes of Rick Santorum and John Hagee, then it would probably gain a good deal of support from American Jews. J Street, however, has far bigger ambitions—ambitions that, unfortunately for the group, are built on a set of extremely dubious claims.

The Font Bureau

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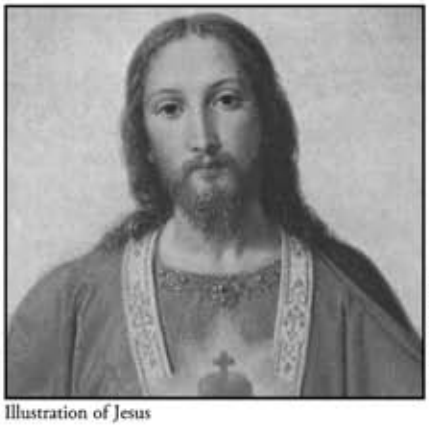

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Illustration of Jesus

About Your Professor

Dr. Bart D. Ehrman is the James A. Gray Professor and Chair of the Department of Religion at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The author or editor of 17 books, he has received many awards and prizes during his tenure at UNC including the Bowman and Gordon Gray Award for excellence in teaching.

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The movers and shakers behind the organization allege that American Jews, whose political orientation is overwhelmingly liberal, are not accurately represented by AIPAC and other long-established pro-Israel groups. (Full disclosure: Earlier this year, I traveled to Israel on an AIPAC-sponsored trip for journalists.) Some J Street supporters point to a 2007 survey conducted by the American Jewish Committee (AJC), which found that 58 percent of American Jews identify as Democrats (only 15 percent classify themselves as Republicans) and that Jews overwhelmingly trust Democrats on the Iraq war, terrorism, and the economy. "Within the U.S. Jewish community, there's [a gap between] the hawkish views expressed by leaders and 'pro-Israel' activists and the more dovish opinions of much of the community," Gershom Gorenberg, one of the group's intellectual mavens, recently wrote on *The American Prospect*'s website. But the real gap, it turns out, is between the miniscule group of writers and activists involved with J Street and the majority of American Jews. It's true that American Jews are overwhelmingly liberal on most issues; the problem for J Street is that Israel simply isn't one of those issues. According to the same AJC survey cited by J Street supporters, nearly three-quarters of American Jews do not believe that Israel can "achieve peace with a Hamas-led, Palestinian government," as J Street's founder advocates. What's more, 55 percent believe that negotiations between Olmert and Abbas "cannot lead to peace in the foreseeable future." And a whopping 82 percent agree with the following statement: "The goal of the Arabs is not the return of occupied territories but rather the destruction of Israel." None of this should be particularly surprising. After all, holding liberal views on issues like taxes and gay marriage—or even issues like the Iraq war and terrorism—is not mutually exclusive with favoring a tough line on Hamas.

A perusal of J Street's list of supporters further undermines its pretensions to mainstream credibility. One of the most prominent Israelis involved with the group is Avrum Burg, former speaker of the Knesset. A member of a distinguished Israeli political family, he set off a political scandal last year when, in an interview with *Ha'aretz*, he claimed that "to define the State of Israel as a Jewish state is the key to its end"; he has also compared contemporary Israel to pre-Nazi Germany. Naomi Chazan is a former Knesset member from the left-wing Meretz Party, which has just five seats (out of 120) in the Knesset. Henry Siegman, a former Senior Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, has compared Israel to apartheid South Africa, accused Israeli leaders of having the U.S. government "in their pockets," and claimed (absurdly) that the 2000 intifada "was not planned by Arafat, but a spontaneous eruption of Palestinian anger."

Moreover, J Street's depiction of the pro-Israel establishment—read, AIPAC—as wildly hawkish is more than a bit of a stretch. I called Steve Grossman, AIPAC's president from 1992 to 1996, to ask him what he thought of this line of attack. After stepping down from his AIPAC post, Grossman became national chairman of the Democratic National Committee, and he later served as chairman of Howard Dean's 2004 presidential campaign. Unsurprisingly, the notion that AIPAC is a right-wing organization strikes him as ridiculous. "There are lots of people who are involved with AIPAC, including me, who have always believed that the two-state solution is essential and the deep involvement of the United States to find a solution, however intractable the problems may be, is absolutely axiomatic," he says. He points to AIPAC's early support for the negotiations that led to the 1993 Oslo accords—staunchly opposed by hawks in both Israel and the United States—as but one example where AIPAC angered many of its conservative supporters. "There were people in AIPAC who felt Oslo was a bad idea, but I'm still proud of the fact that the first American Jewish organization to support Rabin and Peres and the Oslo accords was AIPAC," he told me.

Given that AIPAC and other similar groups already speak for most American Jews, and given that J Street's founders are well outside the mainstream of Jewish public opinion, it's far from clear what, exactly, the new organization can realistically hope to accomplish. Of course, if J Street someday surpasses AIPAC in membership and manages to convince the majority of pro-Israel voters in the United States that negotiations with Hamas are a smart idea, then it will rightly be able to accuse other groups of misrepresenting American Jews. But that is about as likely as crossing J Street on a journey from I to K.

James Kirchick

Maybe We Can't

The black case for Obama-skepticism.

Ninety percent of black Democrats support Barack Obama. So that might leave an observer wondering: What the hell is up with that other 10 percent? Are they stupid? Do they hate their own race? Do they not understand the historical import of the moment?

I can shed some insight on this demographic anomaly. In gatherings of black people, I'm invariably the only one for the Dragon Lady. I'll do my best to explain how those of us in the ever-shrinking minority of a minority came to our position.

But, before going any further, let me fully disclose my predispositions. I disliked Obama almost instantly. I never believed the central premises of his autobiography or his campaign. He is fueled by precisely the same brand of personal ambition as Bill Clinton. But, where Clinton is damned as "Slick Willie," Obama is hailed as a post-racial Messiah. Do I believe that Obama had this whole yes-we-can deal planned from age 16? No, I would respond. He began plotting it at age 22. This predisposition, of course, doesn't help me in making the case against Obama, especially not with black people. But, believe me, there's a strong case to be made that he isn't such a virtuous mediator of race. And it's this skepticism about Obama's racial posturing that has led us, the 10 percent, into dissent.

Let's begin with the *locus classicus* of Obama love, Andrew Sullivan's encomium in *The Atlantic*. He writes:

> Earlier this fall, I attended an Obama speech in Washington on tax policy that underwhelmed on delivery; his address was wooden, stilted, even tedious. It was only after I left the hotel that it occurred to me that I'd just been bored on tax policy by a national black leader.

This is presented as a confession, and Sullivan honestly admits his reaction is based on his stereotyping of blacks. Add to that another Obama supporter, Senator Claire McCaskill of Missouri, calling Obama the first black politician to "come to the American people not as a victim but rather as a leader." You hear this kind of talk all the time. Never mind the dignified glories of Booker T. Washington, Frederick Douglass, Martin Luther King Jr., Colin Powell, Kurt Schmoke, and others. We have arrived at the crux of the matter. So much of the educated white

ANTHONY RUSSO

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people's love for Barack depends on educated white people's complete ignorance of and distance from the rest of us. Barack is the black person they want the rest of us to be—half-white and loving, or "racially transcendent," as the press loves to call him. And, since picking a candidate makes you allies with his other supporters, why would I want to be allies with educated whites whose glorification of Barack depends in large part on their implicit denigration of the rest of us?

But, once you stare past the radiant glow surrounding Obama and begin to study the exact reasons for his so-called racial transcendence, you can't help but conclude that it is mostly hokum. Why do black people love Obama? In large part, it's because of the dark-skinned woman on his arm. Black people (especially black women) are nuts for Michelle. Had Barack married a white woman, his candidacy would've never gotten off the ground with black people. And would whites really be so into him if he hadn't had a white mother? Based on U.S. political history, you would have to conclude: not a chance. My suspicion is that people are ultimately comfortable with Obama because a member of his family looks like them—and, if you think about it, that's not terribly transcendent.

It is Obama's biography, we are told, that will govern his behavior. He was raised by a mother who supposedly didn't see color, so he doesn't see color. He was born into tolerance and multi-racial understanding, so he will practice tolerance and multi-racial understanding. Except, that is, when it's not useful to him.

Which brings me to South Carolina, where I was born and raised. I was there before and during the primary. Recall the moment. Obama was gaining on Clinton—but had also just lost New Hampshire and Nevada. A loss in South Carolina, and he would have been done for.

It's worth remembering that the majority of blacks still think O.J. Simpson is innocent. And, in times like these, when a black man is out front in the public eye, black people feel both proud and vulnerable and, as a result, scour the earth for evidence of racists plotting to bring him down, like an advance team ready to sound an alarm. Barack needed only a gesture, a quick sneer or nod in the direction of the Clintons' hidden racism to avail himself of the twisted love that rescued O.J. and others like him and to smooth his path to victory, and, therefore, to salvage his candidacy.

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After Donna Brazile and James Clyburn started to cry racism, Barack was repeatedly asked his thoughts. He declined to answer, allowing the charge to grow for days (in sharp contrast to how he leapt to Joe Biden's defense a month earlier). But, while he remained silent about the allegations of racism, he gave speeches across South Carolina that warned against being "hoodwinked" and "bamboozled" by the Clintons. His use of the phrase is resonant. It comes from a scene in *Malcolm X*, where Denzel Washington warns black people about the hidden evils of "the White Man" masquerading as a smiling politician: "Every election year, these politicians are sent up here to pacify us," he says. "You've been hoodwinked. Bamboozled."

By uttering this famous phrase, Obama told his black audience everything it needed to know. He was helping to convince blacks that the first two-term Democratic president in 50 years, a man referred to as the first black president, is in fact a secret racist. As soon as I heard that Obama had quoted from *Malcolm X* like this, I knew that Obama would win South Carolina by a massive margin.

I'm part of an Internet group of black people who yammer on about politics. You could extrapolate from polling data that I would be the lone Clinton supporter in the bunch. And, indeed, I am. A member of the group posted the following anecdote after Barack's now famous race speech:

> Last week, I was sitting in a lobby chatting with the woman next to me. All of a sudden, she grabbed my hand as if she realized at that moment that I was black. She asked, do you go to church? I responded in the affirmative. Then she asked, do you go to a black

WHO'S CASHING IN THIS WEEK?

Former Representative Richard Baker

"We finally cleaned up public housing in New Orleans. We couldn't do it, but God did." Thus spoke former representative Richard Baker, Republican of Louisiana, in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. Baker retired from Congress in February to embrace another cause that he no doubt considers divine: As the head of the Managed Funds Association, he's charged with ensuring that his former colleagues don't make a dent in the profits of hedge-fund managers. By all measures, he's taken up his new mission with zeal—a convert's zeal, even. He's now leading the fight against a measure, which he supported while in Congress, that would require fund managers to register as financial advisers.

Josh Patashnik

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church? I said yes. She said, I'm so glad that I met you. I have been really wanting to discuss this with someone. Is it true what they are saying about what goes on in the black church? I smiled and we had a lovely chat about pastors, Obama, civil rights and all things colored. She looked so relieved and really wanted to understand.

This story broke my heart. As the son of a Baptist minister, I can attest that Wright is and was an extreme aberration from how the overwhelming majority of black Christians worship. In church, black people hear about Peter, Paul, Mary, and how to get into heaven. How to forgive. How to love. Not how to vote.

But here was Barack suggesting that Wright's behavior was commonplace in black churches: "I can no more disown him than I can disown the black community." He generalized Wright's ridiculousness to distract from his individual choice to worship under a buffoon for two decades. I have a cousin who attended Wright's church for three weeks and then left, never to return. She had no interest in hearing his nonsense from the pulpit.

Barack obscured the true nature of black religious life because, to do otherwise, he would have had to answer the question, "Why are you a member of a church that is this racially divisive and such a sharp aberration to how the rest of black people worship?" When Barack beautifully suggested that the beliefs pronounced from the pulpit of Trinity in Chicago are not uncommon, he was feeding us garbage. But Barack needed to protect his reputation as a race-healer and unifier, so he told a lie about black religious life to help keep the glow of his own reputation alive. And now the evidence suggests that Barack didn't, in the end, break with Wright over his outrageous racial claims, but over his suggestion that Barack is just a politician.

That so many people have a stake in ignoring these real concerns is troubling. At least the Hillary supporters I know seem to be aware of her more unsavory traits: that she carries a knife with her that she could pull out at any minute. Not so with Obama's fans. It's nearly impossible to get them to admit any wrong in him. Given the choice, I prefer to side with the group that knows their candidate can be a jerk, rather than the group that believes their candidate is Jesus.

CINQUE HENDERSON

Cinque Henderson is a TV writer, working on a book about Abraham Lincoln.

Family Ties

Hillary Clinton's evangelical cabal.

LOST IN THE hysteria over Reverend Jeremiah Wright's remarks is the fact that the current race offers a rare snapshot of the three great strands of American political religion. It's ironic that Wright occupies center stage, since, in the twenty-first century, his is by far the weakest of these—a progressive Christianity which stretches from the Social Gospel to black liberation theology, a big tent of liberal and left religion that's not very crowded anymore. John McCain's problem pastor, a Texas pulpit-pounder named John Hagee, stands in for a more familiar faith: populist fundamentalism, a crowd-pleasing mix of hellfire and the kind of prosperity preaching that encourages followers to ante up to the Lord in both spirit and dollars. And then there's Hillary Clinton's religion: the third strand of political faith, the least understood and arguably the most powerful.

Clinton, an evangelically inclined Methodist, is by far the most religiously rooted and theologically astute of the three candidates, a Christian intellectual schooled in the cold war religion of Reinhold Niebuhr's post-leftist years. Don Jones, her youth pastor and a lifelong spiritual mentor, calls the faith he instructed her in then and which they still share a third way between old-school fundamentalism and liberal Christianity. It's not centrism, though; Jones describes it in terms of Burkean conservatism, after the eighteenth-century reactionary philosopher's belief that change should be slow and come without the sort of "social leveling" that offends class hierarchy.

That's the crux of the conflict between the progressive Christianity that's broad enough to encompass both Jeremiah Wright and Jimmy Carter, and the elitist variation long embraced by Hillary: The former dreams always, if imperfectly, of challenging power, while the latter works to reaffirm it. Clinton's faith is not the liberal version of Christianity that Democratic leaders have traditionally invoked—instead, her version, exemplified by her alliance with a shadowy network of powerful conservative Christians, is steeped in the kind of establishmentarianism that she has otherwise tried to distance herself from throughout the primary season.

CLINTON'S FORMAL introduction to the publicity-shy network of mostly evangelical elites in government, military, and business known to the world as The Fellowship—and to its adherents as The Family—came at a lunch organized on her behalf in February 1993 at the Cedars, "an estate on the Potomac that serves as the headquarters for the National Prayer Breakfast and the prayer groups it has spawned around the world," as she wrote in *Living History*. "Doug Coe, the longtime National Prayer Breakfast organizer"—and the de facto leader of the The Family, dubbed by *Time* the "Stealth Persuader"—"is a unique presence in Washington: a genuinely loving spiritual mentor and guide to anyone, regardless of party or faith, who wants to deepen his or her relationship with God."

Or with the kind of politically useful friends one might not make otherwise. For the eight years she lived in the White House, Clinton met regularly with a gathering of women who put aside political differences to seek—for themselves, for their husbands' careers—an even greater power. Among Clinton's prayer partners were Susan Baker, the wife of Bush consigliere James and a former board member of James Dobson's Focus on the Family; Joanne Kemp, the wife of conservative icon Jack, responsible for introducing the political theology of fundamentalist guru Francis Schaeffer to Washington; Eileen Bakke, a leading activist for charter schools based on "character" and the wife of Dennis Bakke, then the CEO of AES, one of the world's largest power companies; and Janet Hall, the wife of Representative Tony Hall, once a socially liberal Democrat from Ohio who, in The Family's care, became pro-life, anti–gay rights, and simply confused about the separation of church and state. Hillary's "prayer warriors," as she called them, sent her daily Scripture verses to study, and Baker provided Clinton with spiritual counsel during "political storms."

When Clinton moved to the Senate, she became a regular at a weekly Senate prayer meeting led by Coe, and rumor spread among evangelical elites that she was seeking individual spiritual counsel with Coe. "She needs that nucleus of energy that the Coe camp produces," the Reverend Rob Schenck, president of another elite Capitol Hill ministry called Faith and Action, says. "Washington right now is a town where, if you're going to be powerful, you need religion."

But what kind of religion? The Family's major concern, as revealed in the nearly 600 boxes of documents in their archives, is power itself. Its ministry is shaped not by the needs of the poor but of the wealthy, the "up and out," the "key men," whom The Family believes God anoints for leadership. These chosen,

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gathered in "cells," can listen to Christ's private teachings for the powerful, which they'll then put into action for the benefit of the masses. It's a trickle-down religion, classical political paternalism.

In Coe's teachings, such ideas come across bluntly, to say the least. In 2002, I sat in on a conversation between Coe and Republican Representative Todd Tiahrt of Kansas, who'd come to The Family's C Street House—a former convent on Capitol Hill—for counseling. Coe sought to explain the secret of success for God-led elites who'll work together toward His kingdom: "a covenant," he said. "Like the Mafia. Look at the strength of their bonds. . . . See, for them, it's honor. For us, it's Jesus." Coe listed other men who had changed the world through the strength of the covenants they had forged with their "brothers": "Look at Hitler," he said. "Lenin, Ho Chi Minh, bin Laden."

In a video I obtained of Coe preaching to a group of elite evangelical leaders in 1989, Coe expands upon the concept. "Hitler, Goebbels, and Himmler were three men. Think of the immense power these three men had, these nobodies from nowhere. . . . Jesus said, 'You have to put me before other people. And you have to put me before yourself.' . . . [T]hat was the demand to be in the Nazi party. You have to put the Nazi party and its objectives ahead of your own life and ahead of other people." Coe's only evident argument with Hitler is the Führer's substitution of himself for the Father.

David Kuo, a former special assistant to President Bush, defends Coe's Hitler talk as a metaphor for commitment. But it's more than that. Since Coe assumed leadership of The Family in 1969, according to The Family's archives he's used its prayer networks to facilitate U.S. support for God's "key men" overseas, such as the recently deceased Indonesian dictator Suharto, a Muslim willing to pray with Coe so long as American arms kept flowing to his brutal regime, and the Somali dictator Siad Barre, who agreed to pray with Family emissary Senator Chuck Grassley.

Of course, The Family no more owns Hillary than Jeremiah Wright's beliefs define Obama's or John Hagee will choose John McCain's bombing targets. For one thing, Hillary is not a member of Coe's Family. Rather, she's a "Friend," a semi-formal designation that marks her as less elect than a member but more chosen than the rest of us. Her goals are not always their goals, but, when they coincide, Hillary and Family members work well together, as on initiatives to reframe workplace religious freedom as a license for religious discrimination and international religious freedom as a justification for an interventionist foreign policy. As with Wright and Obama, the problem is not whom Clinton knows, but the ideas she shares.

The third way of American Protestantism exemplified by The Family isn't about a return to an imagined past, as longed for by Hagee's populist fundamentalism, or a vision for the future, as dreamed by the best traditions of progressive religion. It's a faith in things-as-they-are, a conviction in keeping with the reductionist reading of Romans 13:1 embraced by The Family: "[T]he powers that be are ordained of God." Within the Family, it doesn't confront ideas, it coexists with them, its power growing by absorbing enemies rather than destroying them. "We work with power where we can," Coe declares, "build new power where we can't." Clinton is a perfect example. Critics compare Clinton's faux populism on the campaign trail to George W. Bush's patented style of fake folksiness. But Bush, who found his faith at the bottom of a bottle, comes to his populism by way of traditional fundamentalism; it's Hillary who's the true establishment believer.

Jeff Sharlet

Jeff Sharlet is an associate research scholar at New York University's Center for Religion and Media and author of The Family: The Secret Fundamentalism at the Heart of American Power, from which this essay is adapted.

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David Cowles

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The Big Race

Obama and the psychology of the color barrier.

JOHN B. JUDIS

THE ISSUE OF RACE is the longest-lasting cleavage in American politics. It is also perhaps the least understood. The open exploitation of racist sentiment by vote-hungry politicians was for centuries a durable American tradition. More recently, race has assumed a subtle, often unspoken form during campaign season, as Republicans have sought white votes by slyly associating their Democratic opponents with controversial black figures like Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton, or with topics—welfare, crime, federal funding for "midnight basketball"—that many voters identify with African Americans.

Now, with Barack Obama inching closer to the Democratic nomination, race looms yet again as a central factor in American politics. Already, race has played a key part in the Democratic primary, almost certainly hurting Obama among swaths of voters in states like New Jersey, Ohio, and, most recently, Pennsylvania. If he manages to win the nomination anyway—and it appears he will—race seems likely to play an even larger role in the general election.

What role, exactly, will that be? No one knows for sure, but the field of political psychology offers some clues. In recent years, scholars have been combining experimental findings with survey data to explain how race has remained a factor in American elections—even when politicians earnestly deny that it plays any part at all. In 2001, Princeton political scientist Tali Mendelberg summarized this research in a pathbreaking book, *The Race Card*. Her provocative analysis is hotly debated and far from conclusive; political psychology, after all, is not a hard science. Still, her ideas and those of other academics help to shed light on what has happened so far in the primaries and what might unfold once Obama wraps up the nomination. Their findings suggest that racism remains deeply embedded within the psyche of the American electorate—so deep that many voters may not even be aware of their own feelings on the subject. Yet, while political psychology offers a sobering sense of the difficulties that lie ahead for Obama, it also offers something else: lessons for how the country's first viable black presidential candidate might overcome the obstacles he faces.

IF YOU WERE BORN BEFORE 1970 or if you read public-opinion polls, then you cannot doubt the profound transformation wrought by the civil rights era. In 1944, the National Opinion Research Center asked whether "Negroes should have as good a chance as white people to get any kind of job, or [whether] white people should have the first chance at any kind of job"—and 55 percent still thought white people should have the "first chance." By 1972, only 3 percent thought so. But some academics—noting the bitterness of battles over busing, affirmative action, and aid to cities, as well as the evolution of the GOP into a virtually all-white party—reasoned that racial prejudice remained, even if it was no longer overtly expressed. They believed it had simply changed form. Their challenge was to define and to demonstrate the existence of this new racism.

Many social scientists had long rejected the possibility that humans might harbor unconscious attitudes different from their conscious behavior. But, in trying to explain the persistence of racial prejudice, political psychologists were forced to hypothesize different levels of awareness and motivation. On the highest level was public moral reflection guided by social norms—which led to Trent Lott being pilloried when he famously said in 2002 that, if Dixiecrat Strom Thurmond had been elected president, the country could have avoided "all these problems." Beneath this, however, was a realm of knee-jerk opinion that might contradict a person's moral reflections; and still beneath that were unconscious attitudes, which, like a person's knee-jerk opinions, were often at odds with his or her public moral reflections. If racial prejudice persisted, it was on these deeper levels.

Political psychologists devised new tests to uncover these sentiments. First, they crafted survey questions aimed at unearthing what they called "symbolic racism," "modern racism," and, most recently, "racial resentments," which ascribe to blacks as a group certain negative attributes or undeserved advantages. For example, researchers asked respondents whether they agreed or disagreed with statements such as "It's really a matter of some people not trying hard enough; if blacks would only try harder they could be just as well off as whites" or "Over the past few years, blacks have gotten more economically than they deserve."

Experimenters then inserted questions like these into the American National Election Studies (ANES), extensive biennial surveys funded by the National Science Foundation. The answers revealed a degree of racial resentment that wasn't apparent from more explicit questions about racial bias. In 1986, for instance, 59 percent of respondents agreed that blacks were not trying hard enough (only 27 percent disagreed), while 67 percent thought blacks should work "their way up … without any special favors." Psychologists David Sears and Donald Kinder, as well as others, found that this racial resentment was the single most important factor—more important than even conservative ideology or political partisanship—in explaining strong opposition to a host of government programs that either directly or indirectly benefited minorities. Of course, that doesn't mean there couldn't be principled conservative opposition to government-guaranteed equal employment or urban aid. But, according to the political psychologists, racial resentment played the largest role in fueling public skepticism.

The answers also revealed which groups within society continued to harbor racial resentment. With the help of Harvard doctoral student Scott Winship, I looked at the levels of racial resentment in ANES data from 1988, 1992, and 2000 (the questions were omitted in 1996). What Winship and I found was that resentment was highest among males rather than females, the middle class rather than the wealthy or poor, those lacking a college degree, those who worked in skilled or semi-skilled blue collar jobs or as laborers, and residents of small towns in the Midwest and South. Does that profile sound familiar? It's

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more or less a description of the white working-class voters who have spurned Obama and with whom John Kerry and Al Gore had trouble. The only groups that didn't evince racial animosity toward blacks were voters with post-graduate degrees and, of course, African Americans. Hispanics were nearly as prejudiced as whites, and a group labeled "other" that includes Asian Americans was even more so—a partial explanation, perhaps, for why Obama fared so poorly among these groups in California. Clearly, racial resentment persisted—just in a more nuanced form.

In fact, the structure of this modern racism was even more complicated than the ANES data suggested. In a study published in 1995, four psychologists from Indiana University recounted taking a group of subjects who had earlier taken the racism test (the questions had been interspersed among scores of other questions) and giving it to them again. This time, however, a black experimenter conducted some of the tests and a white experimenter the others. The psychologists discovered that, when the interviewer was black, white respondents scored substantially lower on the racism scale than before. This meant that gut-level reactions could be easily influenced by moral reflection and social norms. What psychologists needed was a method of measuring prejudice that elicited immediate emotional reactions rather than the products of deliberation.

TOWARD THAT END, they devised tests that measured racial attitudes without subjects knowing what was happening or being able to adjust their responses to social norms. In a study that appeared in 1989, University of Wisconsin psychologist Patricia Devine flashed words on a screen faster than her subjects could recognize them. Some of the words, like "blacks," were associated with African Americans; others were neutral. She then asked subjects whether a person's actions in a deliberately ambiguous story about a customer wanting his money back signified hostility or not. After words associated primarily with African Americans were flashed, the subjects rated the person's actions decidedly more "hostile" than after predominately neutral words were flashed. This suggested to Devine that terms associated with blacks were priming unconscious stereotypes about aggressiveness or hostility.

Another kind of test—known as an implicit association test—used the time it took to complete word association exercises to unmask stereotypes. Psychologists would ask subjects to associate positive and negative adjectives with African American and European American faces by pressing different keys on a computer. At each interval in the experiment, subjects would be told which kind of adjectives to pair with which subject. If a subject regularly took longer to pair positive words with a black face than he did negative words, that indicated unconscious racial bias.

Using data from more than 15,000 self-selected subjects who took the test on a website, psychologists Anthony Greenwald, Mahzarin Banaji, and Brian Nosek found that the same sorts of respondents who had registered higher on the racial resentment scale were more inclined to associate negative adjectives with an African American face. For instance, subjects who had not graduated from college displayed more prejudice than those who had. Men also were more prejudiced than women.

In addition, according to questions they answered before taking the test, there was a sharp disparity between what subjects said they believed and what the test showed. For instance, only 32 percent of high school graduates said they favored whites over African Americans, but in the test 64 percent did. This disparity suggests that, in answering questions about what they believed, subjects opted for prevailing norms over private sentiments. They did not want to appear racist, even though, at some level, they were.

But the problem with implicit association tests—or tests that use subliminal cues—is deciding what they mean in the real world. Do the unconscious racial feelings they uncover affect the way whites view policy, parties, and politicians? And, if so, how decisively?

IN ELECTIONS over the last three decades, Republican politicians have repeatedly used ads, push polls, and surrogates to appeal to white voters' racial fears and resentments. These ranged from George H.W. Bush's Willie Horton ad in 1988 to Republican Bob Corker's infamous "Harold, call me" ad in his 2006 Tennessee Senate race against African American Harold Ford, which appealed to long-standing fears about black sexuality.

In *The Race Card*, Mendelberg argues that political ads can indeed awaken underlying racial stereotypes and attitudes, just like a black face flashing subliminally on a screen. She recounts the story of the Horton ads, which first appeared in June but became widespread in October. While the press initially presented them as being about crime, Horton's picture also appeared—stirring unconscious racial associations. Using the ANES survey, Mendelberg drew connections between the ad's prominence and support for Bush against Michael Dukakis. From June to October, she shows, there was a mild correlation between how high a voter ranked on the racial resentment scale and his or her support for Bush. After October 1, when the ads were more widely aired and discussed, the correlation became much stronger.

In a similar vein, Nicholas Valentino, Vincent Hutchings, and Ismail White from the University of Michigan ran a series of experiments in 2000 using a hypothetical George W. Bush campaign ad that promised to cut taxes, reduce wasteful spending, and reform the health care system. There were three versions of the ad, all with the same text: One showed neutral images of laboratory workers and medical x-rays; another showed a black person counting money and a black mother and child in an office just as the narrator announced Bush's opposition to spending "tax dollars on wasteful government programs"; a third showed white people in the same roles. After watching the ads, subjects were asked to fill out questionnaires that included measures of racial resentment and their preference between Bush and Gore. The findings were similar to Mendelberg's. After seeing the neutral ad or the ad picturing undeserving whites, subjects who scored higher on the racial resentment test were no more likely to support Bush than subjects who scored lower. But, when subjects saw the ad picturing undeserving blacks, there was a strong correlation between how high they scored on the racism scale and their support for Bush. "Overall," the political psychologists wrote, "these results suggest that racial cues make racial concerns more accessible in memory, subsequently boosting the impact of these concerns on candidate evaluations."

Mendelberg's most controversial claim is that these ads work best when the appeal is implicit. If the appeal is explicit, she argues—that is, if politicians actually *say* that blacks are undeserving—then they lose support because they have violated the norm against racism. Although voters will respond unconsciously to an implicit appeal that they don't perceive as racist, they will recoil for reasons of conscience or social disapproval to an appeal that either is, or is seen as, racist. Mendelberg asserts that Bush actually lost support to Dukakis in the closing weeks of the 1988 campaign because, on

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October 21, Jesse Jackson denounced the Horton ad as racist and Dukakis's running mate Lloyd Bentsen followed suit two days later. That made explicit what had previously been implicit.

But other psychologists have questioned Mendelberg's theory of implicit and explicit racial communications. Two political scientists, Gregory Huber and John Lapinski, tried to test Mendelberg's theory by comparing the effects of two anti-welfare ads: one using a visual image of a black recipient and the other adding explicit language about "too many welfare recipients, especially blacks," taking "advantage of our tax dollars." They found that the explicit message did not produce a "significantly more liberal policy opinion than the implicit message." Karen Kaufmann, a political scientist at the University of Maryland, is also skeptical about Mendelberg's theory. "My own work in the context of local politics suggests that fairly explicit racial appeals succeed quite often," she says.

Some distinctions might help preserve what is valid in Mendelberg's argument. First, one has to distinguish between kinds of explicit messages. If a message obviously violates norms against old-fashioned, pre–civil rights racism—as Lott's did—then it is likely to backfire; but if it leaves any room for disagreement about whether it is racist, then it may not. Second, a lot depends on which voters candidates are appealing to. For example, researchers have shown that white women are more likely than white men to react negatively to racist appeals. George Allen learned this lesson in his 2006 Senate race when he lost support among female voters in northern Virginia after uttering a racial slur against an Indian-American.

But there are clearly limits to how much charging racism can help Democrats. During the 1988 election, Dukakis

Brooks Kraft

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did surge in the last weeks, but it was at best only partly attributable to denunciations of the Horton ad as racist—at the time, most political analysts attributed it to Dukakis's belated adoption of a populist economic appeal. And Dukakis's recovery in those last weeks by no means made up for the ground he lost in the first weeks of October when the Horton ad dominated the airwaves. Even Mendelberg acknowledges that the Horton ad "helped George Bush win the election." Similarly, in the 2006 Tennessee Senate race, Ford was able to make up some ground after Corker's "Harold, call me" ad was denounced as racist, but he was not able to undo the damage the ad initially caused.

So making an implicit racial appeal explicit can help an embattled Democrat among some groups, some of the time—but it is hardly a surefire defense against the race card. That leaves one other option: changing the subject. In a campaign where a large proportion of voters would score high on a racial resentment test, a politician's best hope of countering the race card may be to simply emphasize a more important issue. Mendelberg herself acknowledges that "an effective defense against implicitly racial appeals requires an issue that trumps race in the considerations of white voters. In the nineteenth century, this issue was primarily sectionalism—northern whites' resentment of southern whites' secession. In the twentieth century, this issue was primarily economic prosperity and cherished social welfare programs." Bill Clinton used this approach successfully in 1992—a year when the Los Angeles riots had inflamed racial sentiments—to win back white working-class voters who had left the party in prior decades.

What, then, can the political psychology of race tell us about the current primaries and the coming general election? Clearly, Obama gained some votes in the early primaries from college-educated Democrats who liked the idea of an African American candidate transcending the historic conflict over race. And, if he had not been running against a popular female candidate, he might have won more support among white women. But Obama also lost voters to racial prejudice.

One indication is the exit polls. The percentage of voters who backed Hillary Clinton (or, earlier, John Edwards) while saying that the "race of the candidates" was "important" in deciding their vote is a fair proxy for the percentage of primary voters who were disinclined to support Obama because he is black. That number topped 9 percent in New Jersey; in Ohio and Pennsylvania, two crucial swing states, it was more than 11 percent. And that's among Democratic primary voters, who are, on average, more liberal than the Democrats who vote in general elections.

Obama's connection with the Reverend Jeremiah Wright, which exploded into the news after the Ohio primary, may do lasting damage to his candidacy by undermining his attempt to transcend race. Wright's words tie Obama to the stereotype of the angry, hostile—and also unpatriotic—black who is seen as hating both whites and white America. Wright turns Obama into a "black candidate" like Jackson or Sharpton. And, as a black candidate, Obama falls prey to a set of stereotypes about black politicians.

Some of these have to do with abilities. A 1995 study found that voters believe black politicians "lack competence on major issues." Other stereotypes relate to ideology. Several studies have shown that if subjects compare a black and white candidate with roughly equal political positions, they will nevertheless see the black candidate as more liberal. Obama is already vulnerable to charges of inexperience, and, after Wright surfaced, he fell prey to an ideological stereotype as well. Whereas he benefited in the initial primaries and caucuses from being seen as middle-of-the-road or even conservative, his strongest support has recently come from more liberal voters. In Pennsylvania, he defeated Clinton among voters who classified themselves as "very liberal" by 55 to 45 percent, but he lost "somewhat conservative" voters by 53 to 47 percent and moderates by 60 to 40 percent. In a national Pew poll, Obama's support among "very liberal" voters jumped seven points between January and May, while his support among "moderates" dropped by two points. Since Obama's actual policies are, on the whole, no more liberal than Clinton's (his health care plan, for instance, is inarguably more conservative), these trends strongly suggest that some voters are stereotyping him because of his race.

If Obama wins the Democratic nomination, he should be able to inherit the white women who backed Hillary Clinton. As political psychologists have shown, these voters should be largely amenable to his candidacy. He should also continue to enjoy an advantage among white professionals. But Obama is likely to continue having trouble with white working-class voters in the Midwest—voters who tend to score high on racial resentment and implicit association tests and who, arguably, decided the 2004 election with their votes in Ohio. Obama will also have trouble with Latinos and Asians, groups that score high on both indexes, and that can be important in states like California. It's not hard to quantify Obama's problem: If 9 to 12 percent of Democratic primary voters in swing states have been reluctant to support him because he is black, one can assume that, in the general election, 15 to 20 percent of Democrats or Democratic-leaning Independents may not support him for the same reason.

Can Obama surmount these obstacles? If the strong version of Mendelberg's thesis is correct, then the very fact that Obama is African American will undercut any appeals to racial fears or resentments. And, if elections were held in the manner of the Iowa caucus, where voters publicly debate their positions and where Obama won substantial white working-class support, then Mendelberg's stronger thesis might well prove true. But elections are held in the privacy of a voting booth, where a voter can give voice to fears and resentments without danger of being heard. Obama may be able to sway some white voters to his side by drawing attention to race, but probably not enough to fully compensate for the disadvantage he faces.

If addressing racial resentments directly is not the answer, what is? As Mendelberg also suggests, it's changing the subject—doing what the Republicans of the 1870s and the Democrats of the 1990s did. This year, that means diverting voters' attention from the politics of race to the plight of the economy and the continuing quagmire in Iraq.

In the end, the lesson of political psychology for Democrats is not to avoid nominating black candidates. It is simply to understand that America's racial history continues to influence the calculations of voters—sometimes near the forefronts of their minds, sometimes in the deep recesses of their unconscious. For liberals, acknowledging these obstacles is the first step to blunting them. If Obama can focus the election on the economy and Iraq, he could very well win in spite of the angry words of Reverend Wright and 200 years of both old-fashioned racism and newfangled racial resentment. If he can't, he is likely to suffer the same fate as Michael Dukakis—and this time it won't take a Willie Horton commercial. ◆

ANTHONY RUSSO

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Internists Endorse Legal Access to Medical Marijuana

The American College of Physicians, the nation's largest organization of Internists, is calling for protection of both doctors and patients from criminal and civil penalties in states that have adopted medical-marijuana laws.

A position paper just released by their board of regents lists half a dozen diseases for which marijuana has already proven effective and they say the federal government must stop blocking promising research into this beneficial drug.*

"Evidence not only supports the use of medical marijuana in certain conditions but also suggests numerous indications for cannabinoids... The science on medical marijuana should not be obscured or hindered by the debate surrounding the legalization of marijuana for general use."

The College of Physicians now joins the ground swell of medical groups that fully or partially support research and access.

Score Card

For	Against
American College of Physicians	
Institute of Medicine	
Leukemia & Lymphoma Society	
American Academy of Addiction Psychiatry	
American Academy of Family Physicians	
American Academy of HIV Medicine	
American Nurses Association	
American Society of Addiction Medicine	
Canadian Medical Association	
British Medical Association	
American Pain Foundation	
American Medical Women's Association	
American Public Health Association	
The Medical Society of the State of NY	
Rhode Island Medical Society	
California Medical Association	
Arthritis Research Campaign	
HIV Medicine Association	
American Medical Students Association	
Lymphoma Foundation of America	
American Association for Social Psychiatry	

Common Sense for Drug Policy
www.CommonSenseDrugPolicy.org www.DrugWarFacts.org
www.ManagingChronicPain.org www.MedicalMJ.org
www.TreatingDrugAddiction.org
info@csdp.org

* For the full report go to: www.mpp.org/acp or www.acponline.org/acp_news/medmarinews.htm

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Siege Mentality

How impeachment explains the Clinton campaign.

MICHAEL CROWLEY

Do you know who I am? I'm the big rubber clown doll you had as a kid, and every time you hit it, it bounces back. That's me—the harder you hit me, the faster I come back up.

Bill Clinton to Newt Gingrich, Winter 1995

The Clintons find themselves victimized and under siege. The presidency is being stolen from them. The press is out to get them. They deride elites and champion the masses. They live in a constant state of emergency. But they will endure any humiliation, ride out any crisis, fight on even when fighting seems hopeless.

That might sound like a fair summary of how Bill and Hillary Clinton have viewed the past five months. But it also happens to describe what, until now, was the greatest ordeal of the Clintons' almost comically turbulent political careers: impeachment. That baroque saga hardened the Clintonian worldview about politics and helps to explain their approach to this brutal campaign season. The Clintons have been here before, you see. They're being impeached all over again.

Even by the time Monica Lewinsky's name surfaced on the *Drudge Report* in January 1998, Bill and Hillary Clinton were plenty familiar with drastic reversals of fortune. Bill's future seemed ruined when he lost his bid for a second term as Arkansas governor in 1980; he started campaigning almost immediately and was back in office two years later. His 1992 campaign was defined by his "comeback kid" recovery from philandering and draft-dodging crises. After Republicans romped in the 1994 elections, Washington debated Clinton's very relevance.

For a time, it seemed the Lewinsky scandal might have exhausted their deep reservoir of resilience. After Bill—cornered by DNA on that famous Gap dress—confessed in a televised speech that was long on defiance and short on contrition, some Democrats were squirming.

Congressional Democrats were the superdelegates of 1998—worried that the Clintons' campaign to save themselves would extend into the fall, threatening their own political existences. Some in the Senate were on the brink of travelling to the White House to advise the president to resign. But congressional Democrats ultimately rallied, and Hillary played a decisive role in that effort. "I'm the field general of this operation," she told Democratic Representative Jim Moran, according to *Washington Post* reporter Peter Baker's definitive history of impeachment, *The Breach*. (Hillary had served as a staff lawyer on the House Judiciary Committee during the Watergate proceedings. Her fluency in impeachment law enabled her to make a powerful case about Republican abuses.) So, if Hillary has believed that she can sway superdelegates in the face of conventional wisdom, it's because she has some experience to justify her self-confidence.

Surviving impeachment didn't just require savvy tactics; it required defiance. The press predicted that MonicaGate would drive the Clintons from the White House. And, just as some liberal commentators argue that Hillary should end her candidacy for the good of the party and her own reputation, in 1998 many media outlets made similar arguments about her husband. *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, which had twice endorsed Bill, editorialized that resigning would be "the honorable thing." And it wasn't just ink-stained wretches. For a time, it seemed the entire Washington elite wanted the Clintons banished. A day before the 1998 election, Georgetown über-hostess Sally Quinn wrote in *The Washington Post* that "the Washington establishment is outraged by the president's behavior" and suggested that he resign to spare her town further humiliation. Never mind that poll after poll showed Americans were quite content with Clinton.

To survive this assault, the Clintons built up a counternarrative of the way Washington works. They believed that the city's snooty press and opinion elites viewed them as provincial hicks, too déclassé to win admission to their cozy Georgetown clique. And this was an early seed of a deeper critique that the Clintons came to adopt: that the press is composed of elites who are out of touch with average America. After Sally Quinn's infamous article ran, Paul Begala went to the Oval Office, waving it in his hand and declaring, "This is perfect." Bill kept it on his desk for weeks as a reminder of the disconnect between elite opinion and the public. That disconnect became a favorite theme of Clinton pollster Mark Penn, who explained to one interviewer last year that "[media] elites are increasingly separated from the kind of struggles that working- and middle-class voters are feeling." And it burst to the surface in South Carolina earlier this year, when Bill Clinton berated a CNN reporter who had asked him a question about campaign tactics after a town hall meeting. "Shame on you," he said, noting that "not one single, solitary soul" at the event had such a question. "This is what you live for," Clinton added scornfully.

And this critique of the establishment has led the Clintons to awkwardly embrace a kind of populism. Despite their Yale Law pedigrees and presence at Davos and mansion in Kalorama, they find themselves touting the wisdom of the masses. "The American people … are tired of seeing Washington focused on politics and personalities," Clinton said in November 1998. "They want the people and their issues and their future taken care of, and that's what we're here to do." Clinton campaign spokesman Howard Wolfson was channeling a similar anti-insider sentiment when he said in early May: "Many pundits have counted Senator Clinton out many times during this contest. … Thankfully for us, the punditocracy does not control this process; voters do."

Populism is potent in the hands of many politicians. But the Clintons have perfected their own brand of it. Impeachment taught them that the specter of defeat could endear them to the public. It's no coincidence that, before several major primaries, Bill Clinton emphasized that Hillary's survival was on the line, or that Hillary's campaign has advertised rather than ignored efforts by pundits and party leaders to force her from the race. She has styled herself as a populist largely by adopting the pose of a fighter—one battling an elite political-media establishment

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that cares little for ordinary people (as exemplified by her derision of experts who trashed her gas-tax holiday proposal as a gimmick). What working-class American can't relate to feeling stepped on by the fancy-pants establishment?

The Clintons aren't just reprising the political strategy that helped them survive impeachment; they're also re-enacting certain critiques of their opponents. They believe that Barack Obama, like the '90s-era House Republicans, has abused the system. They fume that he ran up his delegate lead in low-population red-state caucuses like Nebraska, Idaho, and Kansas with the help of activists who don't represent average Democratic voters. After losing Iowa, Hillary complained that its caucuses weren't accessible to night-shift workers and military personnel. At one February fund-raiser, Hillary said the pro-Obama group MoveOn.org had "flooded" caucus sites and to "intimidate people who actually show up to support me." (It's not clear whether Hillary recalls that MoveOn.org was founded a decade ago to defeat impeachment.) Obama wants to "disenfranchise" Michigan and Florida voters, the Clintonites say, by not seating those states' contested delegates. Though the Clinton campaign doesn't often invoke Ken Starr or Newt Gingrich these days, in at least one case Hillary's people have played the impeachment card. After the Obama camp hammered Hillary for delaying the release of her tax returns, Clinton spokesman Howard Wolfson exclaimed, "I for one do not believe that imitating Ken Starr is the way to win a Democratic primary election."

As they did during the late '90s, the Clintons also rage at the perceived hypocrisy of their opponents. Back then, it was the sexual infidelities of some of their top Republican persecutors, including Henry Hyde. Now Obama is the hypocrite. He attacks Hillary for running a negative campaign even as he trashes her ethics and honesty. His allies accuse Bill of playing the race card even as, Bill is convinced, they are playing the race card on him.

Beyond those particulars, however, one gets the overall impression that the Clintons feel Obama shouldn't be here in the first place—that this "young man's" very claim to power is itself questionable. In this sense, the Clintons may be victims of their own sense of victimhood. The vileness of the Clintons' past enemies seems to have convinced them that their enemies always are, by definition, in the wrong. And that Obama's candidacy is almost like another illegitimate attempt to steal a White House that, in some sense, belongs to them.

In the accounts of impeachment, we find Hillary much as she is today: largely isolated, emotionally bruised, but determined to persevere. Just as she described immersing herself in prayer back in the summer of 1998, Hillary recently told *Newsweek* that for solace she often calls up inspiring Scripture she stores on her BlackBerry. And then, as now, she found comfort in her celebrity friends. Last month, it was Elton John smothering her in a bear hug onstage at a fund-raiser. In 1998, it was Stevie Wonder, who visited the White House for a private performance of "No One Walks On Water" which brought Hillary to tears. (Wonder, alas, is now an Obama man.)

And, from the accounts of the Clinton impeachment, we also know how rarely she entertains the idea of quitting. During the darkest days of Ken Starr, there is no evidence the Clintons ever considered resignation. Shortly after the Lewinsky story broke, Dick Morris told Clinton his polling showed that voters would favor his ouster were he exposed as lying about the affair. "We'll just have to win, then," Bill replied.

But not everyone in Clintonland felt that way. One such person was Clinton loyalist Harold Ickes, a top Hillary adviser. As Congress was readying for impeachment, Baker writes, Ickes "considered the current scandal a dire threat to the Democratic hold on the presidency." He told senior Democrats that they needed to push Clinton out of power for the sake of the party—a now familiar line of argument. Needless to say, Ickes's advances went nowhere, and, as he'd feared, Al Gore lost. We'll see in November if the Clintons' refusal to quit has the same effect again. ◆

AP PHOTO/SUSAN WALSH

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The Stupidity of Dignity

Conservative bioethics' latest, most dangerous ploy.

STEVEN PINKER

This spring, the President's Council on Bioethics released a 555-page report, titled *Human Dignity and Bioethics*. The Council, created in 2001 by George W. Bush, is a panel of scholars charged with advising the president and exploring policy issues related to the ethics of biomedical innovation, including drugs that would enhance cognition, genetic manipulation of animals or humans, therapies that could extend the lifespan, and embryonic stem cells and so-called "therapeutic cloning" that could furnish replacements for diseased tissue and organs. Advances like these, if translated into freely undertaken treatments, could make millions of people better off and no one worse off. So what's not to like? The advances do not raise the traditional concerns of bioethics, which focuses on potential harm and coercion of patients or research subjects. What, then, are the ethical concerns that call for a presidential council?

Many people are vaguely disquieted by developments (real or imagined) that could alter minds and bodies in novel ways. Romantics and Greens tend to idealize the natural and demonize technology. Traditionalists and conservatives by temperament distrust radical change. Egalitarians worry about an arms race in enhancement techniques. And anyone is likely to have a "yuck" response when contemplating unprecedented manipulations of our biology. The President's Council has become a forum for the airing of this disquiet, and the concept of "dignity" a rubric for expounding on it. This collection of essays is the culmination of a long effort by the Council to place dignity at the center of bioethics. The general feeling is that, even if a new technology would improve life and health and decrease suffering and waste, it might have to be rejected, or even outlawed, if it affronted human dignity.

Whatever that is. The problem is that "dignity" is a squishy, subjective notion, hardly up to the heavyweight moral demands assigned to it. The bioethicist Ruth Macklin, who had been fed up with loose talk about dignity intended to squelch research and therapy, threw down the gauntlet in a 2003 editorial, "Dignity Is a Useless Concept." Macklin argued that bioethics has done just fine with the principle of personal autonomy—the idea that, because all humans have the same minimum capacity to suffer, prosper, reason, and choose, no human has the right to impinge on the life, body, or freedom of another. This is why informed consent serves as the bedrock of ethical research and practice, and it clearly rules out the kinds of abuses that led to the birth of bioethics in the first place, such as Mengele's sadistic pseudoexperiments in Nazi Germany and the withholding of treatment to indigent black patients in the infamous Tuskegee syphilis study. Once you recognize the principle of autonomy, Macklin argued, "dignity" adds nothing.

Goaded by Macklin's essay, the Council acknowledged the need to put dignity on a firmer conceptual foundation. This volume of 28 essays and commentaries by Council members and invited contributors is their deliverable, addressed directly to President Bush. The report does not, the editors admit, settle the question of what dignity is or how it should guide our policies. It does, however, reveal a great deal about the approach to bioethics represented by the Council. And what it reveals should alarm anyone concerned with American biomedicine and its promise to improve human welfare. For this government-sponsored bioethics does not want medical practice to maximize health and flourishing; it considers that quest to be a bad thing, not a good thing.

To understand the source of this topsy-turvy value system, one has to look more deeply at the currents that underlie the Council. Although the *Dignity* report presents itself as a scholarly deliberation of universal moral concerns, it springs from a movement to impose a radical political agenda, fed by fervent religious impulses, onto American biomedicine.

The report's oddness begins with its list of contributors. Two (Adam Schulman and Daniel Davis) are Council staffers, and wrote superb introductory pieces. Of the remaining 21, four (Leon R. Kass, David Gelernter, Robert George, and Robert Kraynak) are vociferous advocates of a central role for religion in morality and public life, and another eleven work for Christian institutions (all but two of the institutions Catholic). Of course, institutional affiliation does not entail partiality, but, with three-quarters of the invited contributors having religious entanglements, one gets a sense that the fix is in. A deeper look confirms it.

Conspicuous by their absence are several fields of expertise that one might have thought would have something to offer any discussion of dignity and biomedicine. None of the contributors is a life scientist—or a psychologist, an anthropologist, a sociologist, or a historian. According to one of the introductory chapters, the Council takes a "critical view of contemporary academic bioethics and of the way bioethical questions are debated in the public square"—so critical, it seems, that Macklin (the villain of almost every piece) was not invited to expand on her argument, nor were mainstream bioethicists (who tend to be sympathetic to Macklin's viewpoint) given an opportunity to defend it.

Despite these exclusions, the volume finds room for seven essays that align their arguments with Judeo-Christian doctrine. We read passages that assume the divine authorship of the Bible, that accept the literal truth of the miracles narrated in Genesis (such as the notion that the biblical patriarchs lived up to 900 years), that claim that divine revelation is a source of truth, that argue for the existence of an immaterial soul separate from the physiology of the brain, and that assert that the Old Testament is the only grounds for morality (for example, the article by Kass claims that respect for human life is rooted in Genesis 9:6, in which God instructs the survivors of his Flood in the code of vendetta: "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed, for in the image of God was man made").

The Judeo-Christian—in some cases, explicitly biblical—arguments found in essay after essay in this volume are quite extraordinary. Yet, aside from two paragraphs in a commentary by Daniel Dennett, the volume contains no critical examination of any of its religious claims.

How did the United States, the world's scientific powerhouse, reach a point at which it grapples with the ethical challenges of

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twenty-first-century biomedicine using Bible stories, Catholic doctrine, and woolly rabbinical allegory? Part of the answer lies with the outsize influence of Kass, the Council's founding director (and an occasional contributor to TNR), who came to prominence in the 1970s with his moralistic condemnation of in vitro fertilization, then popularly known as "test-tube babies." As soon as the procedure became feasible, the country swiftly left Kass behind, and, for most people today, it is an ethical no-brainer. That did not stop Kass from subsequently assailing a broad swath of other medical practices as ethically troubling, including organ transplants, autopsies, contraception, antidepressants, even the dissection of cadavers.

Kass frequently makes his case using appeals to "human dignity" (and related expressions like "fundamental aspects of human existence" and "the central core of our humanity"). In an essay with the revealing title "L'Chaim and Its Limits," Kass voiced his frustration that the rabbis he spoke with just couldn't see what was so terrible about technologies that would extend life, health, and fertility. "The desire to prolong youthfulness," he wrote in reply, is "an expression of a childish and narcissistic wish incompatible with devotion to posterity." The years that would be added to other people's lives, he judged, were not worth living: "Would professional tennis players really enjoy playing 25 percent more games of tennis?" And, as empirical evidence that "mortality makes life matter," he notes that the Greek gods lived "shallow and frivolous lives"—an example of his disconcerting habit of treating fiction as fact. (Kass cites *Brave New World* five times in his *Dignity* essay.)

Kass has a problem not just with longevity and health but with the modern conception of freedom. There is a "mortal danger," he writes, in the notion "that a person has a right over his body, a right that allows him to do whatever he wants to do with it." He is troubled by cosmetic surgery, by gender reassignment, and by women who postpone motherhood or choose to remain single in their twenties. Sometimes his fixation on dignity takes him right off the deep end:

> Worst of all from this point of view are those more uncivilized forms of eating, like licking an ice cream cone—a catlike activity that has been made acceptable in informal America but that still offends those who know eating in public is offensive. … Eating on the street—even when undertaken, say, because one is between appointments and has no other time to eat—displays [a] lack of self-control: It beckons enslavement to the belly. … Lacking utensils for cutting and lifting to mouth, he will often be seen using his teeth for tearing off chewable portions, just like any animal. … This doglike feeding, if one must engage in it, ought to be kept from public view, where, even if *we* feel no shame, others are compelled to witness our shameful behavior.

And, in 2001, this man, whose prodeath, anti-freedom views put him well outside the American mainstream, became the President's adviser on bioethics—a position from which he convinced the president to outlaw federally funded research that used new stem-cell lines. In his speech announcing the stem-cell policy, Bush invited Kass to form the Council. Kass packed it with conservative scholars and pundits, advocates of religious (particularly Catholic) principles in the public sphere, and writers with a paper trail of skittishness toward biomedical advances, together with a smattering of scientists (mostly with a reputation for being religious or politically conservative). After several members opposed Kass on embryonic stem-cell research, on therapeutic cloning (which Kass was in favor of criminalizing), and on the distortions of science that kept finding their way into Council reports, Kass fired two of them (biologist Elizabeth Blackburn and philosopher William May) and replaced them with Christian-affiliated scholars.

FELIX SOCKWELL

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Though Kass has jawboned his version of bioethics into governmental deliberation and policy, it is not just a personal obsession of his but part of a larger movement, one that is increasingly associated with Catholic institutions. (In 2005, Kass relinquished the Council chairmanship to Edmund Pellegrino, an 85-year-old medical ethicist and former president of the Catholic University of America.) Everyone knows about the Bush administration's alliance with evangelical Protestantism. But the pervasive Catholic flavoring of the Council, particularly its *Dignity* report, is at first glance puzzling. In fact, it is part of a powerful but little-known development in American politics, recently documented by Damon Linker in his book *The Theocons*.

For two decades, a group of intellectual activists, many of whom had jumped from the radical left to the radical right, has urged that we rethink the Enlightenment roots of the American social order. The recognition of a right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness and the mandate of government to secure these rights are too tepid, they argue, for a morally worthy society. This impoverished vision has only led to anomie, hedonism, and rampant immoral behavior such as illegitimacy, pornography, and abortion. Society should aim higher than this bare-bones individualism and promote conformity to more rigorous moral standards, ones that could be applied to our behavior by an authority larger than ourselves.

Since episodes of divine revelation seem to have decreased in recent millennia, the problem becomes who will formulate and interpret these standards. Most of today's denominations are not up to the task: Evangelical Protestantism is too anti-intellectual, and mainstream Protestantism and Judaism too humanistic. The Catholic Church, with its long tradition of scholarship and its rock-solid moral precepts, became the natural home for this movement, and the journal *First Things*, under the leadership of Father Richard John Neuhaus, its mouthpiece. Catholicism now provides the intellectual muscle behind a movement that embraces socially conservative Jewish and Protestant intellectuals as well. When Neuhaus met with Bush in 1998 as he was planning his run for the presidency, they immediately hit it off.

Three of the original Council members (including Kass) are board members of *First Things*, and Neuhaus himself contributed an essay to the *Dignity* volume. In addition, five other members have contributed articles to *First Things* over the years. The concept of dignity is natural ground on which to build an obstructionist bioethics. An alleged breach of dignity provides a way for third parties to pass judgment on actions that are knowingly and willingly chosen by the affected individuals. It thus offers a moralistic justification for expanded government regulation of science, medicine, and private life. And the Church's franchise to guide people in the most profound events of their lives—birth, death, and reproduction—is in danger of being undermined when biomedicine scrambles the rules. It's not surprising, then, that "dignity" is a recurring theme in Catholic doctrine: The word appears more than 100 times in the 1997 edition of the Catechism and is a leitmotif in the Vatican's recent pronouncements on biomedicine.

To be fair, most of the chapters in the *Dignity* volume don't appeal directly to Catholic doctrine, and of course the validity of an argument cannot be judged from the motives or affiliations of its champions. Judged solely on the merits of their arguments, how well do the essayists clarify the concept of dignity?

By their own admission, not very well. Almost every essayist concedes that the concept remains slippery and ambiguous. In fact, it spawns outright contradictions at every turn. We read that slavery and degradation are morally wrong because they take someone's dignity away. But we also read that nothing you can do to a person, including enslaving or degrading him, can take his dignity away. We read that dignity reflects excellence, striving, and conscience, so that only some people achieve it by dint of effort and character. We also read that everyone, no matter how lazy, evil, or mentally impaired, has dignity in full measure. Several essayists play the genocide card and claim that the horrors of the twentieth century are what you get when you fail to hold dignity sacrosanct. But one hardly needs the notion of "dignity" to say why it's wrong to gas six million Jews or to send Russian dissidents to the gulag.

So, despite the best efforts of the contributors, the concept of dignity remains a mess. The reason, I think, is that dignity has three features that undermine any possibility of using it as a foundation for bioethics.

First, *dignity is relative*. One doesn't have to be a scientific or moral relativist to notice that ascriptions of dignity vary radically with the time, place, and beholder. In olden days, a glimpse of stocking was looked on as something shocking. We chuckle at the photographs of Victorians in starched collars and wool suits hiking in the woods on a sweltering day, or at the Brahmins and patriarchs of countless societies who consider it beneath their dignity to pick up a dish or play with a child. Thorstein Veblen wrote of a French king who considered it beneath his dignity to move his throne back from the fireplace, and one night roasted to death when his attendant failed to show up. Kass finds other people licking an ice-cream cone to be shamefully undignified; I have no problem with it.

Second, *dignity is fungible*. The Council and Vatican treat dignity as a sacred value, never to be compromised. In fact, every one of us voluntarily and repeatedly relinquishes dignity for other goods in life. Getting out of a small car is undignified. Having sex is undignified. Doffing your belt and spread-eagling to allow a security guard to slide a wand up your crotch is undignified. Most pointedly, modern medicine is a gantlet of indignities. Most readers of this article have undergone a pelvic or rectal examination, and many have had the pleasure of a colonoscopy as well. We repeatedly vote with our feet (and other body parts) that dignity is a trivial value, well worth trading off for life, health, and safety.

Third, *dignity can be harmful*. In her comments on the *Dignity* volume, Jean Bethke Elshtain rhetorically asked, "Has anything good ever come from denying or constricting human dignity?" The answer is an emphatic "yes." Every sashed and bemedaled despot reviewing his troops from a lofty platform seeks to command respect through ostentatious displays of dignity. Political and religious repressions are often rationalized as a defense of the dignity of a state, leader, or creed: Just think of the Salman Rushdie fatwa, the Danish cartoon riots, or the British schoolteacher in Sudan who faced flogging and a lynch mob because her class named a teddy bear Mohammed. Indeed, totalitarianism is often the imposition of a leader's conception of dignity on a population, such as the identical uniforms in Maoist China or the burqas of the Taliban.

A free society disempowers the state from enforcing a conception of dignity on its citizens. Democratic governments allow satirists to poke fun at their leaders, institutions, and social mores. And they abjure any mandate to define "some vision of 'the good life'" or the "dignity of using [freedom] well" (two quotes from the Council's volume). The price of freedom is tolerating behavior by others that may be undignified by our own lights. I would be happy if Britney Spears and "American Idol" would go away, but I put

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up with them in return for not having to worry about being arrested by the ice-cream police. This trade-off is very much in America's DNA and is one of its great contributions to civilization: my country 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty.

So is dignity a useless concept? Almost. The word does have an identifiable sense, which gives it a claim, though a limited one, on our moral consideration.

Dignity is a phenomenon of human perception. Certain signals from the world trigger an attribution in the mind of a perceiver. Just as converging lines in a drawing are a cue for the perception of depth, and differences in loudness between the two ears cue us to the position of a sound, certain features in another human being trigger ascriptions of worth. These features include signs of composure, cleanliness, maturity, attractiveness, and control of the body. The perception of dignity in turn elicits a response in the perceiver. Just as the smell of baking bread triggers a desire to eat it, and the sight of a baby's face triggers a desire to protect it, the appearance of dignity triggers a desire to esteem and respect the dignified person.

This explains why dignity is morally significant: We should not ignore a phenomenon that causes one person to respect the rights and interests of another. But it also explains why dignity is relative, fungible, and often harmful. Dignity is skin-deep: it's the sizzle, not the steak; the cover, not the book. What ultimately matters is respect for the person, not the perceptual signals that typically trigger it. Indeed, the gap between perception and reality makes us vulnerable to dignity illusions. We may be impressed by signs of dignity without underlying merit, as in the tin-pot dictator, and fail to recognize merit in a person who has been stripped of the signs of dignity, such as a pauper or refugee.

Exactly what aspects of dignity should we respect? For one thing, people generally want to be seen as dignified. Dignity is thus one of the interests of a person, alongside bodily integrity and personal property, that other people are obligated to respect. We don't want anyone to stomp on our toes; we don't want anyone to steal our hubcaps; and we don't want anyone to open the bathroom door when we're sitting on the john. A value on dignity in this precise sense does have an application to biomedicine, namely greater attention to the dignity of patients when it does not compromise their medical treatment. The volume contains fine discussions by Pellegrino and by Rebecca Dresser on the avoidable humiliations that today's patients are often forced to endure (like those hideous hospital smocks that are open at the back). No one could object to valuing dignity in this sense, and that's the point. When the concept of dignity is precisely specified, it becomes a mundane matter of thoughtfulness pushing against callousness and bureaucratic inertia, not a contentious moral conundrum. And, because it amounts to treating people in the way that they wish to be treated, ultimately it's just another application of the principle of autonomy.

There is a second reason to give dignity a measure of cautious respect. Reductions in dignity may harden the perceiver's heart and loosen his inhibitions against mistreating the person. When people are degraded and humiliated, such as Jews in Nazi Germany being forced to wear yellow armbands or dissidents in the Cultural Revolution being forced to wear grotesque haircuts and costumes, onlookers find it easier to despise them. Similarly, when refugees, prisoners, and other pariahs are forced to live in squalor, it can set off a spiral of dehumanization and mistreatment. This was demonstrated in the famous Stanford prison experiment, in which volunteers assigned to be "prisoners" had to wear smocks and leg irons and were referred to by serial numbers instead of names. The volunteers assigned to be "guards" spontaneously began to brutalize them. Note, though, that all these cases involve coercion, so once again they are ruled out by autonomy and respect for persons. So, even when breaches of dignity lead to an identifiable harm, it's ultimately autonomy and respect for persons that gives us the grounds for condemning it.

Could there be cases in which a *voluntary* relinquishing of dignity leads to callousness in onlookers and harm to third parties—what economists call negative externalities? In theory, yes. Perhaps if people allowed their corpses to be publicly desecrated, it would encourage violence against the bodies of the living. Perhaps the sport of dwarf-tossing encourages people to mistreat all dwarves. Perhaps violent pornography encourages violence against women. But, for such hypotheses to justify restrictive laws, they need empirical support. In one's imagination, anything can lead to anything else: Allowing people to skip church can lead to indolence; letting women drive can lead to sexual licentiousness. In a free society, one cannot empower the government to outlaw any behavior that offends someone just because the offendee can pull a hypothetical future injury out of the air. No doubt Mao, Savonarola, and Cotton Mather could provide plenty of reasons why letting people do what they wanted would lead to the breakdown of society.

The sickness in theocon bioethics goes beyond imposing a Catholic agenda on a secular democracy and using "dignity" to condemn anything that gives someone the creeps. Ever since the cloning of Dolly the sheep a decade ago, the panic sown by conservative bioethicists, amplified by a sensationalist press, has turned the public discussion of bioethics into a miasma of scientific illiteracy. *Brave New World*, a work of fiction, is treated as inerrant prophesy. Cloning is confused with resurrecting the dead or mass-producing babies. Longevity becomes "immortality," improvement becomes "perfection," the screening for disease genes becomes "designer babies" or even "reshaping the species." The reality is that biomedical research is a Sisyphean struggle to eke small increments in health from a staggeringly complex, entropy-beset human body. It is not, and probably never will be, a runaway train.

A major sin of theocon bioethics is exactly the one that it sees in biomedical research: overweening hubris. In every age, prophets foresee dystopias that never materialize, while failing to anticipate the real revolutions. Had there been a President's Council on Cyberethics in the 1960s, no doubt it would have decried the threat of the Internet, since it would inexorably lead to *1984*, or to computers "taking over" like HAL in *2001*. Conservative bioethicists presume to soothsay the outcome of the quintessentially unpredictable endeavor called scientific research. And they would stage-manage the kinds of social change that, in a free society, only emerge as hundreds of millions of people weigh the costs and benefits of new developments for themselves, adjusting their mores and dealing with specific harms as they arise, as they did with in vitro fertilization and the Internet.

Worst of all, theocon bioethics flaunts a callousness toward the billions of nongeriatric people, born and unborn, whose lives or health could be saved by biomedical advances. Even if progress were delayed a mere decade by moratoria, red tape, and funding taboos (to say nothing of the threat of criminal prosecution), millions of people with degenerative diseases and failing organs would needlessly suffer and die. And that would be the biggest affront to human dignity of all. ◆

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Stanley Kauffmann on Films

SEVERAL WORLDS

THE LEADING MAN in *Roman de Gare* is middle-aged and short, with a jutting jaw. His presence in a role that is supposed to be magnetic and sexy is an immediate clue that something odd is en route. Another quick clue: the title translates as *Train Station Novel* (something like our phrase "airport novel"). As with *Pulp Fiction*, the title announces that the picture plans to take the type somewhere else.

Not many of us will know this French popular genre, but neither can many of us believe that this picture is run-of-its-mill. The original story is by the director Claude Lelouch, who co-wrote the screenplay with his longtime collaborator Pierre Uytterhoeven. Lelouch, who was born in 1937 and made his first feature in 1960, is an old pro—a term that can be inflected several ways. This is his forty-ninth film (he is still best known here for *A Man and a Woman*, made in 1966). The bizarrerie of *Roman de Gare*, in both its drama and its comedy, suggests that it was conceived for this somewhat bizarre leading man. He is Dominique Pinon, possessed of the self-confidence of an odd-looking person who has been variously successful (as Pinon's career has been). His confidence is justified: he goes far to make us believe that we are really watching the story that we are watching.

At the start, a best-selling novelist (played by Fanny Ardant) is making a painful confession to the Paris police, and she says that her account is so complicated that she must go back to the beginning, in 1998. That account begins so far from the novelist's world that we anticipate a twisty trip. Here, twist details aside, are some of the persons involved. First, Pinon. We are made to suspect at the start that he is a serial child rapist, but he turns out to be someone quite different (who apparently doesn't mind being suspected for a time of being a child rapist). We are also made to think that he is a missing husband, and this, too, turns out otherwise. Crucial in the story is a woman of about forty (Audrey Dana), a hairdresser who has been a member of an older profession. Much of the film takes place on the road, en route to the hairdresser's native town, where her family has a farm. So, in the course of things, we are not only plunged into some aspects of sophisticated life but into farm life as well, with cows next to the kitchen. (At one point we even get an enormous close-up of a horse's behind, which Lelouch seems to supply exactly to draw comment of this kind.) Toward the end, all the strands wind back to and around Ardant, the rich and elegant novelist.

The devices that bring about this finish are alternately clever and corny, even outrageous. (For instance, a passenger on a yacht who is thought to have drowned has instead swum ashore—a long way.) Occasionally we wonder not only what happens next but also why we care. The answer is beautifully simple: character. Each of the major characters and most of the minor ones are individuals, not pawns. Each was seen by Lelouch as a three-dimensional being. Each is the product of a particular background and exists credibly in this less credible story. No, not a story: it would be better to call it a plot, a mess of plottage. Perhaps this is typical of *romans de gare*: whether it is or isn't, it points to a remarkable Lelouch quality.

ANTHONY RUSSO

ROMAN DE GARE
Samuel Goldwyn

STUFF AND DOUGH
Mitropoulos

UP THE YANGTZE
Zeitgeist

While he and Uytterhoeven were concocting these escapades, while Lelouch was directing, he must have known—as any rational person would—that he was straining belief. But instead of slipping into the manipulation of puppets, Lelouch mined the verity of his people. All through *Roman de Gare* we are aware of the reality gap between the characters and the story lines. It is as if a group of genuine individuals had been recruited to perform a cooked-up movie.

Lelouch is still another director known for his use of improvisation, for letting his actors adjust and revamp the dialogue to suit their feelings at the moment. If this method was used here, high marks to it. His editors, Stéphane Mazalaigue and Jean Gargonne, have worked their own magic in whisking us from one locale to another, deliberately astonishing us at first but soon locking us in so securely that we enjoy the whisk.

AT ANY GIVEN MOMENT, it seems that there is one foreign country pouring out rewarding films like a new oil gusher: Germany in the 1970s, Iran in the late 1980s, China in recent years. Obviously these countries had good films past and future, but the concentrated outpourings were extraordinary.

The latest such country is Romania, with *12:08 East of Bucharest; 4 Months, 3 Weeks, and 2 Days*; and *The Death of Mr. Lazarescu*. The last, by Cristi Puiu, won many viewers with its physiological data. They may be disappointed in his new film, *Stuff and Dough*, which has excremental details only at the start, then moves into

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a very different mode, supple where the earlier picture was stolid.

Ovidiu is a young man in Constanta who is the son of small shopkeepers and hopes to have a shop of his own quite soon. He is hired by a saturnine man called Ivanov to take a box of medicines to Bucharest, four hours away, and to get them there by a certain time that day. Ivanov, who will pay well, is stern about the urgency, and he finally gets Ovidiu in motion. The young man sets off jauntily in his van, accompanied by his pal Vali, who brings along his (uninvited) girlfriend.

About Romanian audiences we can't say, but American viewers will know at once that those medicines are in fact illegal drugs and that Ovidiu and friends are getting mixed up in the underworld. Although this must become clear early to an audience here, it comes much more slowly to Ovidiu and Vali. The startling finish confirms the crime element. What we keep asking ourselves throughout is, Haven't Ovidiu and Vali ever been to the movies? How can they not know what is happening?

It is possible that they are slow in the matter because Romania was for so long under a dictatorship that controlled absolutely everything, including films. Happily, in this picture the new freedom for Romania is at least as evident in the direction as in its subject. Very much of it is shot in the van in which the three youngsters are riding, most of it done with a handheld camera in the back seat behind the two young men. The persistence of freehand camera movement, the offhand veristic dialogue, the general sense that the way to make a film is to throw away rules and follow impulse: all this is pure Godard—early Godard, too, when he was liberating himself, before he became the doyen of liberation. Puiu cites other influences, but those long sequences in the car seem pure 1960s Godard.

All the better for it. The pleasures in this picture are to some degree in the sheer behavior—hardly to be called acting—of the principals, but Puiu's directing helps even more. By cinematically flying instead of trudging, he has freshened a worn subject and, in Romania, has apparently brought the twentieth century into the twenty-first.

The Chinese flow goes on. Along with the steady stream of disturbing political and economic news from China comes an almost equally steady stream of attractive films. The latest is a documentary by a Chinese-Canadian, Yung Chang, the son of immigrants. In his voice-over for the film, Chang, who was educated in Canada and New York, explains why he made it. (It is his first feature-length picture.) His grandfather used to tell him stories about a river in China. Indeed, at one point we even hear his grandfather sing a song about it. The film is called *Up the Yangtze*.

Our fear that it may be only a collection of gorgeous vistas is swept away with the first shots—of a modern gray city choked with skyscrapers. It is from this city that the journey begins, and again Chang has a welcome surprise for us. Stunning as many views along the river are, he is out to sell not pictures but life. His film centers on the area where the Three Gorges Dam has been built to supply energy, an enormous project. Chang asks us to imagine the Grand Canyon converted into a lake. Here, too, Chang is more interested in human effects than engineering statistics. Thousands of people were forced to evacuate towns that were to be flooded, many of them physically driven out. Chang puts some of them on camera, one of whom says bitterly, "China is too hard for common people."

Chang centers on a family whom he has persuaded to let his camera become one of them. They are wretchedly poor and live in a hovel that the father built on the river's edge after they were forced out of their home in the doomed town across the river. The teenage daughter of the house wants to go to high school, but they don't have the money. So she gets a job on a luxe cruise ship that carries Western tourists up and down the Yangtze.

Nothing is easier in travel films than to exploit glaring contrasts. Chang doesn't try to escape them: he uses them unabashedly, almost as if fascinated himself. The girl's family has chickens pecking away on the ground under their chairs. On the ship, however, she is uniformed and trained in politesse, sees bottles of wine being coddled, learns the meaning of tips, and moves from sullen loneliness into the company's community. Chang doesn't treat the difference between her home and the ship as an exposé: he is merely presenting conditions that he knows we know must be true.

Chinese comments about the corruption of officials are more frank than we might have expected, and the inevitable pat praise of the government is spouted by others. Between these views floats the ship, where most of the picture takes place. It is a smaller version of an ocean-going cruise monster, with the same aim: to load the passengers with attention and food and drink. Most of the tourists are Canadian and American, and the brutal truth is that the straight shots of tourists look like cartoons of tourists.

Little in *Up the Yangtze* is unexpected (except the occasional adverse comments). Yet we are held by this young man's exploration, close and indeed loving, of a place that he had lived in imaginatively all through his formative years. ◆

Cynthia Ozick
NOVEL OR NOTHING

THE JOURNEY ABANDONED: THE UNFINISHED NOVEL
By Lionel Trilling
Edited by Geraldine Murphy
(Columbia University Press, 256 pp., $26.95)

I.

One of the several advantages of living long is the chance to witness the trajectory of other lives, especially literary lives; to observe the whole, as a biographer might; or even, now and then, to reflect on fame with the dispassion of the biblical Koheleth, for whom all eminences are finally diminished. When we look around at the contemporary scene, we are in the dark, we cannot tell who will live on into the next generation, and who will be dismissed or, worse yet, eclipsed and forgotten. The luminaries of our youth and our prime may turn out to be strangers in the world of our old age.

The "we" and the "our" of the previous sentences are readily seen to be usurpations of Lionel Trilling's characteristic manner—or would be, if Trilling's prose style, and Trilling himself, were familiar to twenty-first-century readers. But Trilling's stature, once prodigious, is so reduced as to have become a joke to certain young critics who favor flippancy and lightness and who, if they are aware of Trilling at all, have learned to despise what he called "moral realism." Unlike Eliot's self-anointed "I," intended as the voice of a visiting archbishop, if

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not a materializing archangel, Trilling's all-embracing "we" had the effect both of companionable intimacy and of shared authority. It also implied a kind of humanist common sense, what every honest intellect will acknowledge in contemplating the exigencies of mortal existence. "We" carried certainty and conviction, and an openness to the serious and the tragic that Trilling in his later work would identify as sincerity and authenticity.

The breadth of Trilling's renown can hardly be understood today. He was a professor of literature at a major university who was at the same time a "figure" (a term he honored) in the culture at large. And what was he really? An essayist; and it is tempting to say, given the expository clamor of the moment—its short views and skimpy topicality—*merely* an essayist. Yet no present-day magazine writer or blogger or reviewer or critic can aspire to what Trilling as essayist encompassed: his aim was nothing less than to define, and refine, civilization. He meant not only to comment or discriminate or analyze or judge, but to "stand for something." And at his death in 1975 at the age of seventy, what he finally stood for was a scrupulously perceptive and sinuously nuanced interpretation of the moral life as expressed in the literature of the West. If the idea of *sage* could be applied to any American essayist after Emerson, that is what he had become. A more modulated perspective would settle for Trilling as the most discerning, the most reasoned, and certainly the most celebrated, critic of his time.

Sage? Essayist? Critic? He did not wish it. It was neither his desire nor his plan. The acclaim that came to him, at forty-five, with the publication in 1950 of *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society*—a collection of ruminations affirming, as he put it, "the inevitable intimate, if not always obvious, connection between literature and politics" in the light of the mind's "great primal act of imagination"—was gratifying, but it could not satisfy his earliest and most urgent intent. In a public lecture in 1971 (he was then sixty-six years old) Trilling permitted himself an astonishing confession—astonishing, it was later revealed, only to his disbelieving audience. "I am always surprised," he said, "when I hear myself referred to as a critic.... If I ask myself why this is so, the answer would seem to be that in some sense I did not ever undertake to be a critic. The plan that did please my thought was certainly literary, but what it envisaged was the career of a novelist. To this intention, criticism, when eventually I began to practice it, was always secondary, an afterthought: in short, not a vocation but an avocation."

Yet this overt admission of self-repudiation had frequently been enacted privately. Portions of Trilling's notebooks, published after his death, disclosed remorseful longing, hidden competitiveness, envious ambition. He envied Hemingway, whose vitality in his "most foolish postures" Trilling saw as a model and a reproach. He envied Jack Kerouac, "not wanting K's book to be good." He envied instinct, physicality, manliness. He scorned his university colleagues as effete. "My being a professor and a much respected and even admired one is a great hoax," he wrote bitterly. "Suppose I were to dare to believe that one could be a professor and a man! and a writer!" The writer, he insisted—he meant the writer as novelist—was a man of action, carrying "his death warrant in his pocket."

Walker Evans, *Lionel Trilling*

It was more than simple yearning. He had the will for it—the compulsion, even under the conditions of his professorial constraints, even while engaged in the opposing rhetoric and argumentum of the essays, to commit to a novel. *The Middle of the Journey*—believed until just the other day to be Trilling's only long fiction—was published three years before *The Liberal Imagination*, with a very different reception for each: heated praise for the essays, coolness toward the fiction. The disparities of execution were considerable. The complex prose of the essays gave way, in the novel, to plainness—passages of spare, often sparse, narrative logically plotted, and clear colloquial dialogue. The tone was objective and straightforward and nearly bare of imagery, though not of descriptive force or drama.

The drama was in the theme, and the theme carried a death warrant in its pocket: the baleful predicament of a brilliant though wayward American, a former secret agent for the Soviets who abandons the Party and is consequently in danger of his life. In an important—and vehement—introduction to a reissue of the novel almost thirty years after its initial publication, Trilling confirmed what had anyhow been generally surmised: that the character of his communist defector, Gifford Maxim, had been inspired by Whittaker Chambers, with whom Trilling had been acquainted as an undergraduate at Columbia. It was not long before reality intervened to shift speculation into certainty:

> From my first conception of it, my story was committed to history—it was to draw out some of the moral and intellectual implications of the powerful attractions to Communism felt by a considerable part of the American intellectual class during the Thirties and Forties. But although its historical nature and purpose are attested to by the explicit reference it makes to certain of the most momentous events of our epoch, the book I wrote in 1946–1947 and published in 1947 did not depict anyone who was a historical figure. When I have said this, however, I must go on to say that among the characters of my story there is one who had been more consciously derived from actuality than any of the others.... This person was Whittaker Chambers.

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But only a few months after my novel was published, Chambers's status in history underwent a sudden and drastic change. The Hiss case broke upon the nation and the world and Chambers became beyond any doubt a historical figure.

The notoriously controversial espionage trial of Alger Hiss turned on Chambers's testimony from his knowledge of the communist underground. The issue was treason, and Hiss, a disarming and plausibly earnest former State Department official who had once been a protégé of Justice Felix Frankfurter, was convicted of perjury, while Chambers was everywhere roundly vilified as a disreputable conspirator and liar favored by Nixon and the red-baiting Senator McCarthy. But what concerned Trilling, both in the unfolding of his novel and in the bitter polemics of his later reflections on it, was the obstinate reluctance of virtue-minded progressives to accept the facts of Stalinist perfidy. "At this distance in time," he wrote in 1975, "the mentality of the Communist-oriented intelligentsia of the Thirties and Forties must strain the comprehension even of those who, having observed it at first hand, now look back upon it, let alone of those who learn about it from such historical accounts of it as have been written. That mentality was presided over by an impassioned longing to believe.... Once the commitment to belief had been made, no evidence might, or could, bring it into doubt. Whoever ventured to offer such evidence stood self-condemned as deficient in good will." These few sentences, written in hindsight, still carry the fury of Trilling's aim in *The Middle of the Journey*: to expose what he deemed the hollowness of those middle-class fellow travelers—"radical intellectuals, and those who did not claim that epithet but modestly spoke of themselves as liberal or progressive or even only democratic"—who denied "the reality which lay behind the luminous words of the great promise."

In Trilling's scheme of moral accountability they are Arthur and Nancy Croom, a good-hearted, do-gooding young couple summering in the country. The Crooms invite their friend John Laskell, who has nearly died from a devastating illness, to recuperate in their pastoral village. Gifford Maxim arrives to join the little group, though he is unwelcome: the Crooms despise and condemn him as a doctrinal deserter. An ideological conflict erupts over the death, through her father's drunken blow, of a fragile neighborhood child. The liberal Crooms have always sympathized with Duck, the ne'er-do-well father, frequently hiring him for odd jobs on their property. Unreliable as he may be as a man, he is nevertheless a poor and ill-spoken laborer, a victim of his class in an indifferent society; it is the flaws of society that have made him what he is. As Arthur frames it, "social causes, environment, education, or lack of education, economic pressure, the character-pattern imposed by society, in this case a disorganized society, all go to explain and account for any given individual's actions." Then Nancy: "It's not his fault," she cries out in Duck's defense, appalled by his careless brutality to the child, yet unwilling, like Arthur, to assign guilt or blame; unwilling also to let the man return to the work he needs. "But I couldn't stand having him around me. I'd think of it all the time. I couldn't stand seeing him. And yet it's not his fault, it's not." To which Maxim, the repentant communist who has repudiated social determinism, replies, "In my system there is one thing yours lacks. In my system, although there is

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never-ending responsibility, there is such a thing as mercy." He goes on:

> Duck can be forgiven. I can forgive him because I believe that God can forgive him. You see, I think his will is a bad one, but not much worse, not different in kind from other wills. And so you and I stand opposed. For you—no responsibility for the individual, but no forgiveness. For me—ultimate, absolute responsibility for the individual, but mercy. Absolute responsibility: it is the only way that men can keep their value, can be thought of as other than mere *things*. Those matters that Arthur speaks of—social causes, environment, education—do you think they really make a difference between one human soul and another? In the eyes of God are such differences of any meaning at all?

The Crooms are horrified—has Maxim turned insane? This is religious talk; it veers into crazy mysticism. Laskell, renewed and illuminated, finds a middle path between Maxim's fevered metaphysics and the Crooms's empty detachment from individual culpability. And when he parts from the Crooms, it is in relief and disillusionment: their friendship is at an end.

The Middle of the Journey is a very good novel, far superior to how it has long been rated. As a political novel, it has not grown stale; the politics of belief are with us still. As a novel of ideas, and of elastic characterization and freely flowing incident, it keeps clear of positions held by pasteboard symbols masking as persons. Laskell's engagement with Duck's little daughter is deft and intimate, throwing off glints of teasing charm. Eros makes its unexpected appearance on a riverbank. Gestures and conversations ring true. And overall, the tone is level and sober, reflecting an invalid's fatigued notice as Laskell reawakens to sharper seeing—observation becoming revelation. A good novel, then; even a very good novel: but subjected to scorn by Trilling's contemporaries, and not yet escaped from their judgment. "The attack on my novel," he recorded—it was a lasting resentment—"that it is gray, bloodless, intellectual, without passion, is always made with great personal feeling, with anger.—How dared I presume?"

As Trilling saw it, what was being questioned was his right to be a novelist at all. His determination to become one was regarded as impermissible literary transvestism. He had made his reputation as an essayist, a thinker, an inquirer into the nature of culture. Lawrence, Conrad, Mann, Kafka, Orwell, and Matthew Arnold were among his touchstones. His groundbreaking studies of novelists took in (in *The Liberal Imagination* alone) Henry James, Sherwood Anderson, Mark Twain, Theodore Dreiser, Rudyard Kipling, and F. Scott Fitzgerald; a longer work was given over solely to E. M. Forster. In an essay of provocative psychological audacity, he dared to say of Jane Austen that, "She is the first to be aware of the Terror which rules our moral situation. . . . She herself is an agent of the Terror."

All these unflinching critical sentiments were distinguished by a recognition of the link between feeling and what Trilling construed as "reality," whose always perilous shadow was illusion. "It can be said," he wrote, "that all prose fiction is a variation on the theme of *Don Quixote*. Cervantes sets for the novel the problem of appearance and reality: the shifting and conflict of social classes becomes the field of the problem of knowledge, of how we know and how reliable our knowledge is." Elsewhere he defined fiction as carrying "the cultural assumptions that make politics," and he was willing to subsume gossip under politics, and vice versa. In brief: more than anyone in his generation, Trilling had penetrated into the secret workings of The Novel: he knew it, he understood it, as an evolving, breathing, expanding, connecting social organism.

Then surely it behooved him to bring forth not merely a good novel, and not merely a very good novel, but a great novel? This he had not done. Q.E.D.: since with all this capacity for greatness, he had not produced a great novel, it must follow that he had produced a bad novel—gray, bloodless, intellectual, without passion. For the lauded critic who stakes his truth on a transcendent standard, there may be a lesson in it: do not try to practice what you preach, or your admirers will gather round to pick your bones.

The Middle of the Journey, despite its variegated successes, was in fact not nearly a great novel. Nor could it have been, and for a reason that cannot be laid at Trilling's feet: he wrote too soon. In 1947 the smell of executions in the cellars of Moscow's Lubyanka prison, headquarters of the KGB, had not yet risen to the nostrils of the world. He was compelled to write abstractly of evils that were revealed viscerally only much later. If the fearful idea of a death warrant inflamed the novelist's intent, it went beyond any threat to the American life of Gifford Maxim. Trilling could readily vivify those progressive intellectuals who spurned the reality behind "the luminous words of the great promise"—they were in his immediate circle. Of the brutish reality itself he could speak, in or out of fiction, only in the screening language of news items, of "politics": purges, show trials, espionage, the Hitler-Stalin pact. What came to be called the Great Terror would have to wait for its definitive exposure by a novelist who had endured it. Not until the publication in the West, in 1968, of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *The First Circle*, and of *The Gulag Archipelago* in 1973, was the human suffering inflicted by the Gulag finally and universally assimilated by its doubters and skeptics.

But well before then—for those who, like Trilling, had eyes to see—it was possible to comprehend the lineaments of that suffering, in particular through the reports and testimonies of Koestler, Souvarine, Silone, Akhmatova, Orwell, Pasternak, and many others. From writers such as these, Trilling could deduce the primal ruthlessness of the Soviet system: he could deduce it, he could infer it, but he could not disinter it—not in the darker corridors of the fictive imagination (as in *House of Meetings* Martin Amis would, fifty-nine years on, when the brokenness and the heinousness had long been laid incontrovertibly and bloodily bare). Inference is distanced cognition, not a cudgel, and Trilling's theme in *The Middle of the Journey* was nothing if it was not the reality of the cudgel. The mind that had uncovered terror in so seemingly pacific a source as *Mansfield Park* was prevented by simple chronology from closer, more fleshly knowledge of the conditions of the Gulag.

Still, it is reasonable to ask, if Trilling *had* known, with the completeness of a later time, the violently corporeal conditions of the Gulag, could he have *done* them—done them, that is, novelistically? Would he have had the blood, the passion, the death warrant in his pocket? This is not a question that will ever be answered. He did not again approach, in fiction, a subject that intimated physical cruelty on a large scale, invoking the anguish of whole populations. To those who disparaged his novel, and to the few who regretted its failure, the letdown for Trilling appeared to be

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so complete that it must clearly choke off any future attempt at a sustained fiction. His was the cautionary tale of the critic who had published a handful of short stories and a single novel, which, justifiably, had no successor. As a literary thinker he was pre-eminent. As a novelist he was beaten.

II.

But he was not beaten. "How dared I presume?" was not, as it turned out, the cry of defeat it looked to be; it was the herald of renewed ambition. Another novel—a second one—was under way, though it may have begun earlier, as a first novel. In any event, Trilling was wholeheartedly preoccupied with it in the years following the unhappy reception of *The Middle of the Journey*. Disappointment spurred him: in a letter to Richard Chase, a Columbia colleague, he confided that he hoped for a "richer, less shaped, less intellectual, more open" work. "I think the next one will be better," he said. Chastened yet emboldened, he confessed to his journal, "There comes an impulse to take myself more seriously, for although measured against what I admire I give myself no satisfaction, yet against what I live with I have something to say and give and might really interest myself—and all this gives to the novel a new validity—the notion is right and I begin to see it substantively."

Six decades were to pass before we were permitted to learn of this novel's existence. Untitled, it was left unfinished—cast out midway, after twenty-four chapters and 150 pages. News of it has erupted like a secret exploding; yet all along it was hiding in plain sight in Columbia's Trilling archive. Columbia University Press has now brought it out as *The Journey Abandoned*, with a valuable introduction by Geraldine Murphy, the scholar who uncovered it, and who serves as its impeccable editor. And though Trilling had vowed a departure from the "intellectual," the new work was inevitably more so, since a number of its characters derived from the fevered arena of literary high culture.

At the same time, and contrary to his hopes, Trilling's second venture was more enclosed than the first, where politics had led outward to intimations of the great world and its deadly upheavals. But the progress of Vincent Hammell, the ambitious young biographer who is its hero, takes him largely into intricately internalized psychological musings. Murphy's edition includes a preface by Trilling, or what she has chosen to present as a preface. To forestall easy mockery ("Henry James had the forbearance to *finish* a novel before writing its preface," for instance), one ought to consider Trilling's opening sentences: "I am sure there is no need for me to explain why I do not want to make a precise formulation of my novel so early in the game. A novel must eventually be conceived through its writing even more than through its originating idea and an abstract statement of the story's impulses at this point might well freeze them and make them useless." Like any preface, this has a public voice—but it may also be the kind of explanatory statement that accompanies an inquiry to a publisher. Whether the manuscript ever fell under a publisher's eye apparently remains unknown.

Still, to attach the term "preface," with its Jamesian reminders, to Trilling's searching reflections and suppositions is exactly right. It is James who presides over Trilling's aspiration; it is James whom he consciously summons, and who serves as his cicerone and mentor. During the period when Trilling was seriously at work on the novel, he was also writing an introduction to *The Princess Casamassima*, and it was here that he set down what must be regarded as his novel's true preface:

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The Princess Casamassima belongs to a great line of novels which runs through the nineteenth century as, one might say, the very backbone of its fiction. These novels, which are defined as a group by the character and circumstance of their heroes, include Stendhal's *The Red and the Black*, Balzac's *Père Goriot* and *Lost Illusions*, Dickens's *Great Expectations*, Flaubert's *Sentimental Education*; only a very slight extension of the definition is needed to allow the inclusion of Tolstoy's *War and Peace* and Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot*.

The defining hero may be known as the Young Man from the Provinces. He need not come from the provinces in literal fact, his social class may constitute his province. But a provincial birth and rearing suggest the simplicity and the high hopes he begins with—he starts with a great demand upon life and a great wonder about its complexity and promise. He may be of good family but he must be poor. He is intelligent, or at least aware, but not at all shrewd in worldly matters. He must have acquired a certain amount of education, should have learned something about life from books, although not the truth.

This, fully elaborated, was Trilling's new theme, and also its line of literary descent. The idea appears again in the unfinished work's preface (the characterization we are obliged to use). "Think of him," he says of Vincent Hammell,

as practical, energetic, not a dreamer or a mooncalf. He has real talent and he does not have the mechanical "shyness" of a sensitive young hero; indeed, one of the notable things about him is his active charm. He has what in a young man passes for maturity. He is decent, generous; but he is achingly ambitious. He has considerable insight into the conditions of his society, he wishes to be genuine, a man of integrity; yet he also wishes to be successful. His problem is to advance his fortunes and still be an honest man. He is conscious of all the dangers; he is literate and knows the fates of Julian Sorel, of Rastignac, of Frederic Moreau—all the defeated and disintegrated young men of the 19th century cycle of failure. He, for his part, is determined not to make their mistakes.

How much Trilling knows! He has already warned himself not to risk knowing too much, lest his story "freeze." But his tone here is strangely after-the-fact—that of a critic who is discussing a recognizable character in an established novel he has frequently read with profit and appreciation. How can Vincent Hammell breathe and freely act if he is designed according to an acknowledged template, if he is swaddled in layers of social and psychological and literary preconceptions? A novelist must understand that one cannot imagine one's characters—they must be at liberty to imagine themselves. And this, too, Trilling understood—understood so well that he took care to instruct his characters in how to observe and judge independently, thereby imprisoning them ever more deeply in his own mind.

Vincent Hammell is a character prescribed. Born in a small town in the Midwest, he is the son of an optometrist. The time is the 1930s; money is scarce. The world of opportunity and hope lies, and lures, elsewhere, and the means of attaining it is through the life of letters. Vincent is a literary aspirant who has already abandoned a work on "nothing less grandiose than a history of American literature in the latter part of the nineteenth century" (Trilling's own field of scholarship, Murphy notes). "I'm twenty-three," he tells his mother despairingly, "and my fine success consists of a quarter-time job at the university, a couple of days a month for the *Advertiser*, oh yes, and the pleasure of instructing ladies . . . in creative writing. Quite a success."

His release from these petty circumscriptions comes through an unexpected proposal from Harold Outram, the powerful director of the Peck Foundation. From a beginning as obscure as Vincent's, Outram contrived to gain importance and acclaim in successive stages: first as a critic, then as a novelist esteemed as "one of the legends of the new American promise," then as a radical agitator, then as an apostate from radicalism (a whiff of Whittaker Chambers again), then as the dean of a celebrated magazine (Chambers wrote for *Time*); and finally as the head of an influential cultural institution, the apogee of it all. But Vincent is cautioned against Outram by his former teacher, Teddy Kramer, a man "of such scrupulous intellectual honesty that he could bring no work to a satisfactory conclusion"—a trait that Vincent equates with Kramer's "Jewish pride." "Let me tell you, Vincent," Kramer warns, "you will see [in Outram] a man utterly corrupt." According to Kramer, Outram is a danger and a sellout: he has abandoned literature's sacred calling for worldly domination.

ANTHONY RUSSO

Outram's offer to Vincent is dumbfounding—the chance to write the biography of the still living but elderly Jorris Buxton, the paramount figure of the age. Buxton's background borders on the improbable: a professor of Greek, a poet, a painter, a novelist—all this before his fortieth year, following which, Outram explains, "he became a physicist. He engaged a tutor and in a year he had learned everything that a brilliant student learns in four years . . . everything he had learned seemed to be there inside him ready to be unfolded. That is, he was a genius. He went to M.I.T. and his doctoral thesis is still famous. . . . He took jobs in several of the great physical laboratories. He went to Europe and studied mathematics. . . . It's *the* story of our time." It is also implausibly conceived: science and math prodigies are generally known to manifest and pursue their gifts very early, proceeding in concentrated unipolar fashion.

But what Trilling was after—to accommodate his plot and its anticipated climax—was some mammoth all-encompassing persona, a type of muscular masculinity steeped in lasting fame: he would have such a man turn imprudently wild in consequence of a reckless obsession with a young girl four decades his junior. Trilling's real-life model, he informs us, was at first Walter Savage Landor, a nineteenth-century English poet of "heroic size," similarly infatuated in old age. Yet Buxton as he develops (insofar as he is developed at all) is closer to an amalgam of William James, the scientist-adventurer, and Henry James, the closeted imaginer—on whom Trilling purposefully bestows a robust heterosexual lust. (Or so Murphy acutely parses it.)

That Outram should choose an unseasoned twenty-three-year-old, evidently talented but lacking any literary standing, for this daunting biographical project—an interpretive likeness of a man "weighty with years, wisdom, power"—is a puzzle. It will not occur to Vincent until much later in the progress of the narrative to suspect Outram of a clandestine motive for so grand an anomaly, and the novel breaks off before any such motive is revealed. In the meantime, Vincent is catapulted into a sophisti-

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cated circle light-years from his shabby Midwestern origins. In the cultivated interiors and environs of Harold and May Outram's home, situated "in a New England town of considerable tradition," he is introduced to a series of half-explained persons, all deeply implicated with one another in ways not immediately apparent.

The cumulative effect of these characters as they enter their respective scenes singly or in clusters is reminiscent of those familiar Hollywood whodunits where all the likely suspects, each with a reasonable alibi, are assembled for interrogation by a shrewdly knowing investigator. Vincent, however, is not shrewd; he is intelligent and alert, though still youthfully uncomprehending, and always tagged with variations of the epithets of incompleteness that Trilling tirelessly attaches to him: "so immature and inexperienced," "waiting for things to happen to him," "like a foreigner in a new land," "the various perils which beset the young man who gives himself to the life of the mind," "with how many attempts to master its own inchoateness would this young mind of his move," "he was a young man who thought much of fame, power, and success in life," and on and on.

In this cloud of unknowing, the emphatically untried Vincent is made to confront a formidably bearded Jorris Buxton, an octogenarian who turns out to be frightened by a thunderstorm; his inscrutable assistant, Brooks Barrett; Garda Thorne, a middle-aged short-story writer of some renown, who at seventeen became mistress to Buxton, then fifty-five (her name purloined from a novel by Constance Fenimore Woolson, a Henry James connection); Linda and Arthur Hollowell, a wealthy couple eager to buy a school to further their social views; Philip Dyas, the school's headmaster, reluctant to sell; Marion Cathcart, the Outram children's young caretaker, to whom Buxton appears attracted; and Claudine Post, whose infantilized teenage charge, Perdita, is described as being in a "not harmless" relation to Buxton.

It is a crowded gallery of carefully delineated portraits, whose innerness is divulged partly through dialogue but far more extensively in passages of cannily analyzed insight. And like pictures on a wall, it is all static—inevitably so, to begin with, since the problem of the story (every story implies a problem) is still undefined when the novel is cut short. Also, it should not be forgotten that the manuscript Murphy unearthed was a draft in formation. The crucial proof of this middle-of-the-journey uncertainty is an appendix she has titled "Trilling's Commentary," yet another overview of the novelist's intentions. There are self-admonitory reminders such as "the chapter should glitter rather more," "make the unlikelihood of the choice of Vincent the greater and also the more acceptable," and "what is making the difficulty is that I have not yet got a new point at which to aim."

Despite these strictures and doubts, Trilling's narrative skill is now and then on bright display, especially in the earliest chapters touching on Vincent's childhood and adolescent friendship with a boy whom Vincent will ultimately outgrow intellectually. Toss Dodge is the little boy who has just moved into the neighborhood:

> Vincent stood on his part of the sidewalk and looked at the newcomer, who looked back and then turned his attention to the moving-men. Vincent kicked his way over to the curb and examined something at the edge of the road. He looked at it with a deep, rather amused curiosity. He touched it with the toe of his shoe. The object, whatever it was, engaged his attention as a Naturalist, a person to whom all things were significant. Actually he was examining nothing at all. But to justify his attention, he picked up a fallen seed-pod, peered at it a moment with a discerning eye, then threw it away.... Meanwhile Toss had taken a position of responsibility near the van. He stood with his hands behind his back, superintending with quiet vigilance the operations of his men. He said nothing but he was sharp-sighted and a slight frown showed that he was not to be imposed on by his subordinates.
>
> They were both now established in sufficient importance and could acknowledge each other.
>
> Vincent said, "Hello," carelessly, take it or leave it.
>
> Toss answered in kind.
>
> "You moving in?" said Vincent.
>
> "Uh-huh. You live here?"

This is a mastery of boyhood worthy of Mark Twain. Nor was Trilling unaware of the intuitiveness through which it was consummated. "The first part," he confirmed, "did grow into something. And it grew with a kind of unconsciousness. This unconsciousness was very beguiling and reassuring."

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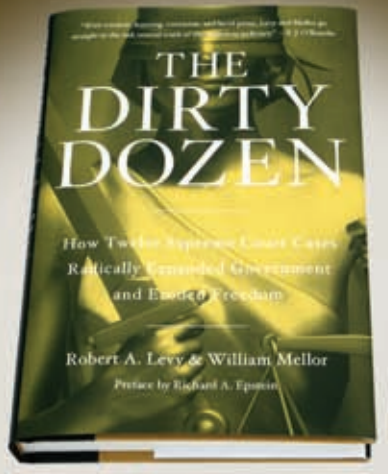

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It will not often recur in the remainder of the narrative. Trilling's habit of theorizing perceptiveness ordinarily overrides the Keatsian negative capability he so much reveres—that openness to the oarless vagaries of the mind regularly invokes in the essays.

Yet the beguiling and reassuring intervals did come. Sentence by sentence, in striking set pieces and in short breaths and long, the freed imagination at times felicitously crops up—a staccato phrase here, a winding image there: wildflowers peeping through monuments of sculptured topiary. One such specimen, visual and tactile, is Buxton's beard:

> It was the best kind of beard that a man can wear, it was short and firm and jutted a little forward. It gave a base to the head and did not mask the face. It suggested fortitude and the possibility of just anger. . . . No one had happened to mention to [Vincent] that Jorris Buxton wore a beard. Out of the haze of other people's attitudes this immediate fact emerged with a happy, bristly reality.

But this happy, bristly reality, impulsively observed and weighed, is too soon dowsed by metaphysics. Trilling is almost never sufficiently free of the burden, or the constriction, of understanding a character too well—even before that character is moved into action or speech. What ought to have been vividly revelatory—the force of the great man's spirit when at last he sits down with his biographer—is somehow deflected into humdrum brooding discursiveness. Its immediate ground is the intrusive presence of Buxton's servile assistant, whose "striking repulsiveness" Buxton mutely erases through a kind of contemplative transcendence, sweeping Vincent into what purports to be sudden feeling:

> Vincent tried to give words to the emotion he felt. It was, he could say, the emotion of pure disinterestedness. . . . Vincent made use of the word "pure" because that word best suggested the sensation of crystalline, translucent being that he had felt. He eventually hit upon another word, "peace," remarking that what was probably meant by that word was a perfect poise of the energies without the alloy of personality. He reminded himself that the ancient philosophers, when they spoke so passionately to recommend death, probably had these conditions in mind. They obviously could not mean non-existence. They must have meant an existence in perfect equilibrium of the impulses and powers, with no element of that greed which they identified as the personality. This condition of being was sometimes permitted by life, but life was always presenting demands that brought the experience to an end. Hence, Vincent supposed, the recommendation of death.

Death, yes! Deadly prose, dead on the page. Where is Buxton in all this? Where, as a matter of fact, is Vincent, through whom these cerebrations course? The beard is *written*; the beard is alive; the beard is a character in a novel. But Buxton has vanished, and Vincent himself recedes behind the privet hedge of abstraction.

The fault is not that Trilling's recitation here deals solely with ideas, and not so much that it is repetitively clotted, and not even that it eschews drama. Thought *as* drama, the act of thinking as a vehicle of high excitement, is anyhow central to Trilling's credo. Vincent's story, the authorial preface points out, "is of a kind that will inevitably throw off ideas; and the characters are articulate, intelligent, and embody certain moralities." Then why does the novel fail—fatally—in this crucial first encounter between its two supposedly articulate and intelligent major figures? Novels—great novels—are known to be studded with meditative insertions that not only do not produce longueurs, they leave behind traces of glory. Dostoyevsky's Grand Inquisitor may be too heatedly elevated an instance; but think of James's Isabel Archer, alone and motionless before the fire, sunk in rumination for twenty uninterrupted pages. *The Portrait of a Lady* can sustain this dialogueless island of inaction because it is preceded and followed by everything that a novel is and does to seduce us into feeling it is alive.

Trilling's refusal—or inability—to allow Buxton to speak at the very juncture at which it is most urgent for him to speak collapses what is to come. Or, rather, he does speak, he is said to speak, but we cannot hear him. It isn't enough for Vincent to send out signals or symptoms of Buxton's thought: "the eyes lived with the life of the contemplating mind . . . the eyes showed, or so Vincent felt, a life beyond the words that Buxton was speaking." But this is dumbshow, a silent movie—where *are* the words? The snatches of Buxton's talk scattered through the few remaining chapters are no more than mannerly clues in the style of "show them in," "do sit down," "a fine bunch of a girl," and one or two meager remarks on Darwin. Vincent can insist, on one occasion or another, that "in whatever way Buxton judged what he saw, he certainly saw a great deal," and still the reassurance will instantly wither. What Buxton sees we cannot see. What Buxton feels we cannot feel. Buxton has no voice and no movement. Buxton is dead; a wraith.

Perhaps Trilling knew it. He knew what his novel was made of. It would be wrong and unfair, even brutal, to say, as many have said, that he was too intelligent to succeed at fiction, which courts fancy more than reason. After all, he had the conditions and trappings of a novel; he had its language, masterly and penetrating; he had the novel's shape and its emotional furnishings; he had the different tenors of his intellect, its analytic capacity and its deep historical wisdom. He had his spurts of beguilement. He had, in short, all the equipment for the engineering of a novel. Yet he must have felt, finally, that he also had a dead man on his hands. Worse, in the end he took himself to be a simulacrum of that man. At fifty-seven, long after he had abandoned what was to have been his second novel, he lamented in his journal, "Nothing has so filled me with shame and regret as what I have not done." He had not become what he hoped to be: a novelist commanding, authentic, and recognized. Instead, he had turned into his own Teddy Kramer, that enervated effigy of "Jewish pride," a creature of such scrupulous intellectual honesty that he could not bring the longed-for work to a satisfactory conclusion.

And why was it imperative to write novels? "In my time," Outram, who gave up fiction for social influence, ruefully tells Vincent, "it was novel or nothing." Outram speaks for Trilling: in his time, novel or nothing. Then was that resplendent body of literary and cultural essays, and the university, and the authority, and the fame, and ultimately the legend—was all that nothing? ◆

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Anne Applebaum

THE BLOG OF WAR

HUMAN SMOKE:
THE BEGINNINGS OF WORLD WAR II,
THE END OF CIVILIZATION
By Nicholson Baker
(Simon and Schuster, 567 pp., $30)

I.

"The ideal Gawker item," Nick Denton, the owner of Gawker Media, wrote in an instant message, "is something triggered by a quote at a party, or an incident, or a story somewhere else and serves to expose hypocrisy, or turn conventional wisdom on its head.

"And it's 100 words long.

"200 max.

"Any good idea can be expressed at that length." According to *The New York Times*, Denton was, when he wrote that, one of the most influential figures in online journalism. It was January 13, 2008.

In a press release, Simon and Schuster announced the publication of *Human Smoke*, a work of "non-fiction" by the novelist Nicholson Baker: It was March 11, 2008. A couple of weeks later, *The New York Times* would explain that the book was not a "straightforward narrative as a historian or a polemicist might do," but rather a series of vignettes—mostly 100 words long, 200 max. The *Times's* reviewer, the writer Colm Toibin, described the work as "a serious and conscientious contribution to the debate about pacifism."

Lauren Wolfe, 25, the president of College Democrats of America, was speaking to *The New York Times*, explaining how she came to understand the events in the world around her—not from conventional narratives but from clips, news items, and vignettes sent to her by others. "I'd rather read an e-mail from a friend with an attached story," she said, "than search through a newspaper to find the story." It was March 27, 2008.

On April 1, 2008—April Fool's Day, as luck would have it—the writer Anne Applebaum was flipping through an old copy of *The New York Review of Books*. There she discovered an article by one Nicholson Baker—the same novelist who had just published *Human Smoke*—describing the phenomenon of Wikipedia.

It's "just an incredible thing," Baker wrote. "In a few seconds you can look up, for instance, 'Diogenes of Sinope,' or 'turnip,' or 'Crazy Eddie,' or 'Bagoas,' or 'quadratic formula,' or 'Bristol Beaufighter,' or 'squeegee,' or 'Sanford B. Dole,' and you'll have knowledge you didn't have before."

Applebaum closed the magazine. Suddenly she understood how Baker had come to write such a profoundly bad book about World War II.

• • •

And that, of course, is not really what happened. Every single fact in the four paragraphs above is correct—correct, at least, in that those are real quotations from real newspapers, and correct in that I really did read about Wikipedia in *The New York Review of Books* on April Fool's Day. Still, the process by which I came to understand how Baker came to write *Human Smoke* was a bit more complicated. Usually, things are a bit more complicated.

Certainly there was no precise moment of revelation. On the contrary, it took me a long time to understand *Human Smoke* in any sense at all. For Baker's book really is a series of pretentious, Gawker-like vignettes, composed in the style of the pastiche I have written above. Each has a source, carefully listed in the back of the book. Most feature a person, often famous, always carefully identified ("Hermann Goering, the second in command in the Nazi party"). Most include, portentously, a date ("It was January 7, 1939"), which at times gives the book the feel of a space-shuttle countdown.

But while the book has a chronological order, it has nothing resembling a narrative. Many of the items concern aspects of history that are well known, and have indeed been catalogued and described many times. The fact that Churchill drank a great deal features prominently, as does the fact that many American politicians, Roosevelt included, did not want the German Jews to emigrate to the United States in large numbers in the 1930s. There are a number of anecdotes that feature what we now call the military-industrial complex. There are also several about Mahatma Gandhi, a famous pacifist, and Jeannette Rankin, a less-famous pacifist. Several concern Goering, and others Hitler. Some are actual pieces of Nazi propaganda, though Baker doesn't say so. Many are familiar, others are merely boring.

Presumably, these items were selected because Baker finds them important, or perhaps because, like a Gawker post, they are meant to "turn conventional wisdom on its head." But ripped from their respective contexts, each item has the same weight as the next. There is no hierarchy, no sense that one enigmatic anecdote might be more important than the next equally enigmatic anecdote, or that one source might be more reliable than the next.

Thus on one page, we have a quote from the young Eleanor Roosevelt, complaining about a party she has to go to with her husband ("Franklin D., the assistant secretary of the navy"), a party she'd "rather be hung than seen at," she writes to her mother-in-law: "Mostly Jews." Then, a few scant pages later, Baker supplies us with another anecdote, this one from a Berlin movie theater. The film is *All Quiet on the Western Front*, and Joseph Goebbels, ("Reichstag member and party leader of Berlin") is watching it from the balcony. As the film is running, Nazi Brownshirts—brought to the theater under Goebbels's direction—jump up and begin shouting "Jews out! Jews out!" at the audience. Confusion ensues, and the film is stopped. They then repeat the action the next day, and the next. The film is canceled.

What is the implication of these two anecdotes, placed in the same sequence? That the shallow upper-class anti-Semitism—or, more correctly, class prejudice—of the young Eleanor Roosevelt was the moral equivalent of the fanatical anti-Jewish violence of Goebbels? That the woman who drafted the U.N.'s Universal Declaration of Human Rights (not that this is mentioned) inhabited the same moral universe as the man whose thugs shut down movie theaters, and eventually a lot more? Reading this book, I had a sickening suspicion that yes, this was precisely Baker's point.

But of course this was only a suspicion, since Baker never tells us what his point is, unless you count the explanation provided in the book's afterword. This consists of six spare paragraphs, as brief and enigmatic as the other vignettes in the volume. Baker states, not without pomposity, that "This book ends on December 31, 1941. Most of the people who died in

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the Second World War were at that moment still alive. Was it a 'good war'? Did waging it help anyone who needed help? Those were the basic questions that I hoped to answer when I began writing."

As it happens, these basic questions are not difficult to answer. Was it a "good war"? Well, "good" is an imprecise word—all wars are horrible for the soldiers who fight them and the civilians who die in them—but certainly it was, as Adam Kirsch pointed out in *The New York Sun*, an "absolutely necessary" war, and in this sense it was without question "good." Certainly it prevented a "bad" outcome: a world dominated by Nazi Germany—a world in which the Jews of Europe would have been completely liquidated, in which the peoples of Eastern Europe would have become Nazi slaves, in which racist totalitarianism would have been the political norm in Europe instead of liberal democracy, in which art and literature would have been put to the service of the Nazi regime. As for the second question—"did waging it help anyone who needed help?" the answer is, quite obviously, yes.

But Baker never answers the questions that he asks. That is, he has not undertaken the historian's task of hearing multiple arguments, listening to myriad explanations, looking at a wide range of evidence and then marshaling the evidence in order to draw a conclusion. He has not even carefully examined, as other historians have done, the various arguments about the aerial bombardment of civilians—the military tactic that appears to bother him most—to make a judicious argument against its use. Instead, he has used his license as a "novelist" to excuse himself from all of the tedious work of genuine knowledge. By way of research, he has read back issues of *The New York Times* and *The New York Herald Tribune*, along with a notably limited group of other historical sources, all long familiar. From them, he has plucked bits of information, shards of the historical record that he finds compelling, or perhaps contrary to what he imagines to be the conventional wisdom—and left his readers to draw their own conclusions.

Here is where I should note, and gladly, that there are many legitimate ways to write history, even many avant-garde, non-linear, novelistic ways to write history, as the historiography of World War II itself well illustrates. There are, after all, political histories of that war, diplomatic histories, social histories, military histories, and intellectual histories, as well as histories written from American, British, Polish, Russian, German, Jewish, Japanese, Slovak, Estonian, Bulgarian, Chinese, and Italian points of view, among dozens of others. Besides all that, there are shelves of memoirs of victims and the children of victims, and perpetrators and the children of perpetrators. There are more purely literary accounts, such as W. G. Sebald's semi-autobiographical novels, which mix fact and fiction but are nonetheless deeply committed to understanding precisely what happened and why.

I should also note that there are many accounts of World War II that challenge the simplistic notion—held by nobody I know—that there is such a thing as a purely "good" war, as opposed to an "absolutely necessary" war. At the moment, there are probably several dozen accounts of the firebombing of German cities and the unnecessary murder of German civilians in print, in multiple countries. The fundamental unfairness of the war's conclusion—just as the Nazi camps were liberated in 1945, the Gulag expanded—has been the focus of much East European scholarship for many years. In recent years learned books have focused on the Allies' failure to bomb Auschwitz, the reluctance of Americans and West Europeans to accept Jewish refugees, the Vatican's passivity, the deportation of the Germans from Central Europe at the end of the war, the relationships between American and Nazi businessmen. The horrors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki have been amply described, in many languages. So have Churchill's drinking habits.

There is even, in British historiography, a minor but respectable tradition that questions whether World War II was really worth fighting. In the 1990s, John Charmley, a historian at the University of East Anglia, published a pair of books about Churchill, arguing that the war was wrong because it finished off England as a great power. Had the policy of appeasement been maintained, Charmley argued, Hitler might have made a separate peace with Britain. By rejecting appeasement Churchill failed his country because he destroyed the British empire. Charmley's argument was in many ways unattractive, but it was a serious argument carefully made, based on an interpretation of source material. You could disagree with him, you could challenge his scholarship, you could argue about whether he was right about Hitler's aims or Churchill's intentions.

But what Baker has produced is nothing like this, nothing like history. You cannot fault his scholarship, because aside from the process of accumulating a set of anecdotes, no scholarship has been conducted. Though the book purports to pronounce upon the international situation, all of Baker's sources are in English. Almost all of the stories take place in America, Britain or Germany, as if the war was not really happening in Eastern Europe or Russia, let alone Indonesia and Singapore. He has not worked with many primary sources, other than a few memoirs, and he has not discovered any new material. He leaves out enormous chunks of the story. His description of the invasion of Poland in September, 1939, is limited to two sentences—Goering "ordered a thousand planes into Poland. There were dive-bombers over Danzig"—and he does not mention the Soviet invasion of Poland seventeen days later at all.

You cannot disagree with Baker's argument, because no argument has been made. Baker does not build a case, he insinuates something, leaving the reader to guess what. My best paraphrase of his view goes like this: Churchill was a bully and a drunk. The Roosevelts were snobs and anti-Semites. Therefore they were not good people. Therefore their so-called "good" war must have been hypocritical. Therefore they could only have been fighting because they were in hock to the military industrial complex and they had a bloodthirsty fondness for bombing raids. Moreover, the Holocaust was in part a German response to British aggression, and the Japanese invasion of China was a response to Chinese aggression, and Britain's very participation in the war was the result of Churchill's aggression, especially his stubborn refusal to respond to Hitler's "peace offensive." Therefore the pacifists were right.

Obviously some other readers, and maybe even Baker, might paraphrase his arguments in a slightly different and less provocative way. But since we do not know how he would formulate them, and since we cannot gauge the true intent of his arguments, we cannot respond to them at all. When Baker presents us with a piece of Nazi propaganda—that the Jews were deported "to the East" (code for extermination) because the British bombing campaigns which he appears to oppose had created a housing shortage in Hanover—we do not know what this means. Can he be serious? When, later, he quotes Goebbels as a trustworthy source on Churchill's character ("This man walks over dead bodies to satisfy his blind and presumptuous personal ambition," says the man who burned books on Hitler's behalf), or when he quotes a Japanese parliamentarian arguing for peace ("There are no problems between the

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United States and Japan that cannot be settled by peaceful diplomacy"), no explanation or amplification is appended. Does Baker really take Nazi and Imperial Japanese statements at face value? Or is this some sort of irony?

And the same can be said of the pacifists he quotes liberally, and, one must assume, approvingly: *Human Smoke*, he writes in his afterword, is dedicated to the pacifists who "have never really gotten their due." And yet intentionally or not, he makes these people appear deeply foolish, even idiotic. At one point Baker quotes Oswald Garrison Villard, a man who declared that Roosevelt's Four Freedoms "cannot sustain the shock of our entering and pursuing this war." But we did enter and pursue the war, and nevertheless Roosevelt's Four Freedoms—most notably freedom of speech and religion—thrived in the post-war world, at least by comparison to the 1930s. In the same vignette, Baker also quotes with apparent approval the pacifist Jeannette Rankin, who declared that "you cannot have war and democracy." But we did have war, and we did have democracy, so what can Baker mean by this? Is this a veiled statement about Iraq? Or something less serious?

Perhaps, I wondered at one point, the whole book is a gigantic practical joke, a stunt intended to provoke scholars, anger Jews, infuriate Poles, and thereby create massive publicity for Nicholson Baker. And so my initial reaction to *Human Smoke* was to throw it across the room. Subsequently, I discovered that this reaction was very common, especially among practicing historians.

II.

Unlike Nicholson Baker or the editors of Gawker, I cannot really supply an anecdote that will explain, in a hundred words or less, why I decided to pick up the book again and write this review. But a few days after finishing *Human Smoke* as well as Baker's treatise on Wikipedia, I happened to be sitting with a group of writers, historians, and critics, all fellows at the American Academy in Berlin, talking about it. As fate would have it—Baker loves portentous and possibly significant coincidences, and who doesn't?—we were sitting in a villa overlooking the Wannsee. Just across the lake, we could see the Haus der Wannsee-Konferenz, the place where, in 1942, the Nazis decided to exterminate the Jews of Europe.

Had the drunken Churchill and the anti-Semite Roosevelt not decided to fight World War II, none of us would have been there. There would have been no American Academy in Berlin, of course, with its prominently hung portrait of the villa's original Jewish owners, now the Academy's patrons; indeed, there would have been no Jews in Berlin, no Americans in Berlin, and no critics and writers in Berlin, save those approved by the Third Reich. Instead, a happy Nazi family would have been looking out over the lake, enjoying the same view.

Yet the dull truth is that we arrived at the topic of Nicholson Baker not because we were talking about the war, but because we were talking about the contemporary cult of the non-expert, or rather the anti-expert: the bloggers who assume that the "mainstream media" is always wrong, the Wikipedia readers who think that a compilation of random anecdotes is always preferable to a learned study, and of course the college students who nowadays prefer to get their news in emails from friends because it is too bothersome to read a newspaper. And the even duller truth is that *Human Smoke* belongs to this cult, and not to the more exotic outer reaches of the historiography of World War II. One cannot properly understand Baker's book by comparing it to, say, Martin Gilbert's *Auschwitz and the Allies* or to the latest work on the fire-bombing of Dresden. To understand *Human Smoke* properly, one needs to read Gawker, Wikipedia, and above all *The Da Vinci Code*. The latter comparison might sound odd, but the resemblance is actually quite striking. Like Baker, the author of *The Da Vinci Code* is not a historian. And also like Baker, Dan Brown is a man apparently obsessed by his belief in the existence of a widespread historical conspiracy. (For those lucky enough to be unfamiliar with it, Brown's theory goes like this: the church hierarchy, along with the world's religious historians, art historians, and church historians, have been hiding the fact of Jesus's wedding to Mary Magdalene, as well as his subsequent children, from the public for centuries, using a massive cover-up perpetuated by Opus Dei, and so on, and on, and on.)

Although Brown writes works of fiction, he has made a career out of hinting that all his writing, based on some kind of "research," somehow reflects deeper truths. Sometimes he is up front about this, casting aspersions on the very notion of "history" itself, apparently assuming that no one has ever done so before. "Many historians," he solemnly and nonsensically told an interviewer, "now believe . . . that in gauging the historical accuracy of a given concept, we should first ask ourselves a far deeper

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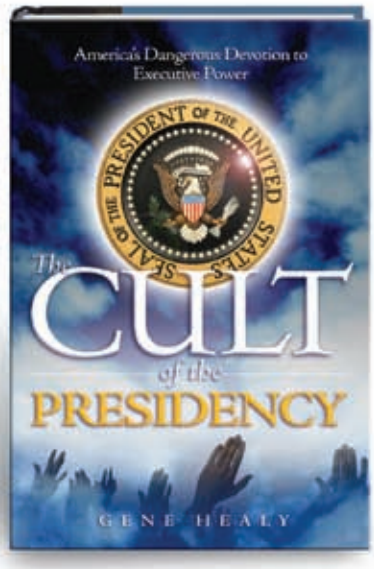

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question: How historically accurate is history itself?"

Sometimes Baker is a bit cagier. *The Da Vinci Code* includes, as a kind of appendix, a page titled "FACT." Asked about this, Brown replied: "If you read the 'FACT' page, you will see it clearly states that the documents, rituals, organization, artwork, and architecture in the novel all exist. The 'FACT' page makes no statement whatsoever about any of the ancient theories discussed by fictional characters. Interpreting those ideas is left to the reader." Baker could have appended precisely the same statement to *Human Smoke*.

Like Brown, and like half the blogosphere, Baker starts with the assumption of a conspiracy. For many decades, the historians of World War II have been hiding important pieces of information from the public. It is therefore up to the amateurs—the novelists, the outsiders—to recover these essential pieces of information, to go back and read *The New York Times* themselves, and to reconstruct the historical narrative from scratch. The only difference is that instead of treating those "forgotten" facts novelistically, which is in a way more honest, Baker has chosen to present them as a collection of carefully dated and footnoted anecdotes, which gives them a greater aura of truth. And just like Brown, Baker then leaves interpretation "up to the reader."

And the reader, both of *The Da Vinci Code* and *Human Smoke*, is duly flattered. Read Brown's book and you, all by yourself, can decide whether Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene! Read Baker's book and you, all by yourself, can decide whether World War II was worth fighting! You too can get the facts and make up your mind! And never mind that the facts have been chosen selectively, even randomly, by writers who do not understand the context in which they originally appeared, and indeed have deliberately tried not to understand it. Brown and Baker are not "experts," after all. They are, to put it politely, *artistes*.

This same way of thinking is presumably what turned Baker into an ardent fan of Wikipedia, another product of the cult of the anti-expert. Though it has its uses—I don't know anyone who doesn't check it with frequency—the fact remains that Wikipedia is often wrong, or skewed, or biased in odd ways, and has to be used with great caution. That is because its contributors include, alongside the experts, a substantial number of cranks and pranksters. And that is precisely what Baker likes about it. In his recent *New York Review of Books* article, Baker described how delighted he was, when Wikipedia began, by the "flattering name" given to Wikipedia contributors:

> They weren't called "Wikipedia's little helpers," they were called "editors." It was like a giant community leaf-raking project in which everyone was called a groundskeeper. Some brought very fancy professional metal rakes, or even back-mounted leaf-blowing systems, and some were just kids thrashing away with the sides of their feet or stuffing handfuls in the pockets of their sweatshirts, but all the leaves they brought to the pile were appreciated.

Yes, Wikipedia is democratic; and yes, it treats all authors as equally worthy; and yes, it lets the self-tutored compete with the academics—and yes, it is deeply and profoundly anti-intellectual, as well as often wrong. Who needs a Ph.D., or even a college course? What is the use of studying for years in boring old libraries? So what if you have accumulated, through hard work, some real expertise? Who cares if you know a few languages? On Wikipedia it doesn't matter, since, as Baker explains approvingly, "everyone's identity was hidden behind a jokey username" in any case.

Baker did not adopt these views in a vacuum. Anyone who has ever spent any time surfing the blogosphere will recognize his perspective immediately. It is true that there are many excellent, well-educated bloggers, whose contributions to public debates are invaluable, and who have served to prod the establishment institutions of many professions to try harder. At the same time, there are also many bloggers who, without any knowledge or expertise whatsoever, believe their opinions must by definition surpass those found in the "mainstream media," or the "conventional histories," simply because they are self-appointed "critics," whether right-wing, left-wing, or off the charts. The result of their efforts is that quality—accuracy, truthfulness, learnedness—is disappearing beneath the sheer quantity of random, wrong, and irrelevant information.

Until now, I had assumed, like everyone else, that the main victim of this new vogue for arrogant ignorance would ultimately be the "mainstream media" itself. Who needs *The New York Times* or *The Washington Post* if you can get your news from Google and your opinions from the latest, hottest, angriest blog? But *Human Smoke* might be a harbinger of what is to come in other spheres: Baker, after all, is the historians' equivalent of the smug bloggers who think that because the mainstream media is sometimes wrong, they are always right—and that if they can find a link to a "fact," that proves it is "true." If Baker can find a compelling anecdote, from *Mein Kampf* or *The New York Times*, that's good enough to make it a part of the historical record. Thus will "conventional" history eventually vanish.

Human Smoke, in other words, is not a conscientious pacifist tract. It is not a clever contribution to today's debate on warfare, and it does not add anything to what we know about World War II. It is a cheerful contribution to the movement against scholarship—a movement which has advanced so far, in fact, that I fully expect these observations, too, to be condemned as "elitism." As one who does contribute (it's pathetic, I know) to the mainstream media on a regular basis, I know that any author who expresses a sliver of doubt about the wisdom of amateurs risks bringing down a torrent of recrimination and insult upon his head. But if we have arrived at the point where a solemn and excited individual can cobble together anecdotes from old newspapers and Nazi diaries, and write them up in the completely contextless manner of blog posts, and suggest that he has composed a serious critique of America's decision to enter World War II, and then receive praise from respected reviewers in distinguished publications, then maybe it is time to say: Stop. ◆

Ein Leben

In the month of her death she stands at the window,
a young woman with a permanent wave, elegant,
thoughtful, gazing outside.
In the brown photograph.

From outside an afternoon cloud of '34
gazes at her, blurred, out of focus,
but faithful to her permanently. From inside
I gaze at her, four years old, almost,

I stop my ball,
and slowly leave the photograph and grow old,
aging cautiously, quietly,
so as not to frighten her.

DAN PAGIS

Translated from the Hebrew by Leon Wieseltier

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Ingrid D. Rowland

BULBS AND BUBBLES

TULIPMANIA: MONEY, HONOR, AND KNOWLEDGE IN THE DUTCH GOLDEN AGE
By Anne Goldgar
(University of Chicago Press, 425 pp., $30)

Deep within the massive masonry structure of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, an archive is tucked away among the domed vaults of the north aisle. For the most part it contains the building's construction records, which reach as far back as the beginning of the sixteenth century, but the archive of the Reverenda Fabbrica di San Pietro also has lists of indulgences (certificates guaranteeing time off in Purgatory) sold in Germany, samples of Renaissance silk, and some seventeenth-century books containing ravishing pictures of tulips. There are tulips with feathery petals, tulips whose white petals are shot with veins of red, tulips that curl with a Baroque flourish. The seventeenth century was the moment when Europe suddenly went mad for tulips, a Turkish wildflower whose graceful shape and extraordinary capacity for mutation made it as capable of infinite variety as Shakespeare's Cleopatra. Tulips were embroidered on dresses, waistcoats and priestly vestments, and woven into tapestries, and painted as stylish embellishments or as the focal point of lush bouquets, their short-lived blooms fixed at last for all seasons. Living tulips made their way into European gardens, transported from Turkey as bulbs and then passed on to Dutch middlemen, whose Protestant faith made them less likely than their Catholic contemporaries to ponder another crusade against the Ottoman infidel.

As the catalogues in the Reverenda Fabbrica di San Pietro prove, tulip mania gripped all of Europe, not just the Netherlands; but the sandy soil and hardy merchants of the province of Holland provided the irresistible flower, then as now, with its most fertile ground. For four decades in the early seventeenth century, tulip prices rose steadily to vertiginous heights. Then, in February 1637, the market collapsed virtually overnight. Tradition has it that desperate Dutchmen drowned themselves in the canals of Amsterdam and Haarlem rather than face financial ruin. Contemporary cartoons ridiculed the tulip speculators as a confederacy of dunces, including the unwitting dupe who cooked and ate a priceless bulb thinking it was an onion. Tulip mania has served for more than three and a half centuries as a warning against the perils of short-sighted capitalism.

Yet, as Anne Goldgar gently informs us at the beginning of her absorbing book, most of what we "know" about tulip mania is pure fiction, borrowed wholesale from a Dutch satire called *Dialogue between True-Mouth and Greedy-Goods*, penned by one Adriaen Roman in 1637, at the very moment when the bubble burst. By comparing the assertions of True-Mouth and Greedy-Goods with surviving archival records in Haarlem, Utrecht, and Amsterdam, Goldgar has discovered that most of the tulip merchants who were active in 1637 continued to trade long after the February crash. The real long-term effect of the crisis, then, was more practical than dramatic: by setting a more reasonable range for tulip prices, it actually stabilized a market that thrives with no less vigor today.

The first Dutch tulip merchants were a special breed, men and women closely linked by marriage, religion, and, most of all, a peculiar combination of passion and expertise. Tellingly, the self-chosen term for the most qualified dealers was *liefhebber*, or lover. Flowers were, for them, much more than a commodity. More prosaically, tulip traders were also known as *bloemisten*, or florists. A conspicuous number of them were Mennonites, and many came from outside Holland. One large and powerful group had fled the religious persecutions that began to mar life in Spanish-dominated Antwerp. Five partners working in Haarlem had originally come from the same group of remote villages in German Swabia. Another dealer, the exotically named Jeronimus Victory, started life in Italy as an insurance salesman named Girolamo Vittori.

As a group, the *bloemisten* ranged from well-off to out-and-out wealthy. They were successful merchants who could indulge in the risky business of exotic flowers because they also carried on a stable trade in less glamorous commodities. In Haarlem, where the records of the seventeenth-century city are especially well preserved, Goldgar discovered that most of the tulip traders made their living as cloth merchants, in company with a certain number of bakers, brewers, and innkeepers. Other *liefhebbers* worked as apothecaries, spice merchants, dyers, gardeners, or, like Jeronimus Victory, insurance brokers. Women entered the business as enthusiastically as men, negotiating for bulbs and working tirelessly to arrange the marriages that bound the *liefhebbers* into a remarkably close-knit community.

As the satirists realized in the late winter of 1637, tulip mania provided a suggestive image of the Netherlands in an age when expanding commerce had brought unprecedented prosperity. Stern, patient practicality had wrested the country's fields and cities piece by piece from the grip of the sea, and although the qualities of persistence and frugality still dominated Dutch society, sophisticated new tastes had also emerged along with the new temptations. Only in this rarefied Golden Age could an object that looked for all the world like an onion have been traded for such dizzying sums of money, all for the none-too-secure hope that a dry brown bulb would one day burst into a flower as ephemeral as it was glorious.

The *liefhebbers'* passion for tulips extended to other wonders of nature and human ingenuity. Goldgar has found them trading paintings, dogs, ostrich eggs, and carved coral as well as bulbs. Theirs was the age of Rembrandt, Vermeer, and Hals, of burghers clad in black woolens and starched collars who imported silks and spices from the far ends of the earth before purveying them in turn to the rest of Europe. The East India Company had just established its foothold in the Spice Islands (now Indonesia); an analogous West India Company would ultimately prove less successful at staving off competition from Spain, Portugal, and the Ottoman Empire.

The risks of Golden Age trade encouraged both a stern Protestant prudence and a love for gambling that could reach levels of comic absurdity, as when Rembrandt and his friends placed bets that they would still be alive at the same time the following year. (Rembrandt lived to collect.) The black-clad burghers who stare back at us from their portraits by Rembrandt and Hals also wear those extravagantly starched and gathered

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collars, with their intricate borders of microscopically fine lace. As people, they present a strange mix of conformity and remarkable personal freedom, practical moderation and unbridled hedonism—and we can still recognize them in their contemporary descendants, who have the same qualities in the same elusive combination.

Dutch archival records are so complete that many *liefhebbers* can be tracked down to their houses and neighborhoods, many of these, too, remarkably well preserved. Goldgar marshals maps and contracts alongside photographs of shops and canals to show how the passion for tulips guided *liefhebbers* even in their choice of places to live. The commercial prosperity of the Golden Age led predictably to flourishing populations, and Dutch cities expanded to meet the growing need for housing. Amsterdam's tulip merchants clustered in the new neighborhoods along the Prinsengracht, the ring-shaped "Prince's canal," where close-packed rows of houses enclosed extensive garden plots. In Haarlem, *liefhebbers* chose property along the main road from Amsterdam, where again large back gardens allowed them to plant each tulip in splendid isolation—a priceless object to contemplate, when it bloomed, in its individual perfection. The contemplative practice may have been inspired by the Ottoman custom of presenting each tulip in its own elaborate pot.

Artist unknown, *Satire on Tulipmania*, c.1650–1700

Yet tulips were as capricious as they were beautiful, and *liefhebbers* suffered all the pains of more conventional lovers. A bulb flowered once a year, for perhaps a week of fleeting glory. And there was also that other notorious lover's flaw: mutability. The plant's unusually quick rate of mutation meant that new varieties emerged all the time. Unfortunately for lovers and traders, the emergence of those varieties was frustratingly unpredictable (in marked contrast, for example, with the breeding of dogs). In the first place, the workings of heredity had yet to be entirely understood—Gregor Mendel's experiments with sweet peas lay two centuries in the future. The flowers, moreover, propagated in two different ways: by pollen and seeds, but also by secondary bulbs, clones called offsets—with each growing season, individual bulbs grew fat underground and then split off into smaller segments. And yet, when the offsets finally bloomed a year later, their flowers did not always look like those of the parent bulb.

It was this curious fact that made tulip trading so risky, and so romantically mysterious. Sometimes the difference was simply a matter of the tulip's marvelous mutability, but in the case of prized "broken" tulips, with their scarlet veins, the effect itself derived not from the flowers' genetic heritage, but from a fungus. One offset of a "broken" parent might have the fungus and another might not, so that thousands of guilders invested in a white Semper Augustus shot with red might result in a plain red flower pushing up from the stately bed that had been prepared for a quite different and more dazzling kind of bloom. Dutch microscopy was literally in its infancy—at the time of the crash, Anton van Leeuwenhoek was a child of five—and so the breaking of broken tulips remained an unfathomable secret.

Goldgar focuses on the social aspects of tulip trading rather than on the flowers themselves. (She writes in full awareness of Anna Pavord's lavish flower-centered book *The Tulip*, which appeared in 1999.) She urges her readers, as already noted, to examine the phenomenon in connection with other kinds of collecting and connoisseurship, and the various kinds of social prestige that followed upon possession of, and knowledge about, exotica. Since traders worked for most of the year with bulbs, that is, with potential flowers rather than actual ones, trust played a more essential role than usual in their transactions. This was one reason that the community of *liefhebbers* tended to be so tight, and so tightly related—and one reason that the shift in prices, when it came, seemed more like an earthquake, the signal of a moral fault line in society rather than a simple, if sudden, economic adjustment.

In fact, a good deal of the allure of tulip mania derived from the flower's peculiar botany, which determined its stubbornly unpredictable behavior in an age that was otherwise busily recognizing nature's patterns and regularities and creating modern science. Seventeenth-century collectors, like seventeenth-century natural philosophers, scrutinized the bewildering variety of the phenomenal world for its underlying order, its laws, principles, and consistencies. So did seventeenth-century traders, sending out their emissaries to the ends of the earth in search of new commodities that could be made into essentials of life—and hence subjected to the laws of supply and demand.

To a satisfying extent, the world ran in harmony with these systems. Amazing creatures like narwhals and armadillos nonetheless begot baby narwhals and armadilloes. The hairy man of the Canary Islands married a normal woman and fathered both hairy children and normal ones. But tulips, for their fleeting beauty and their mutability, inspired visions; even their catalogues, like the ones preserved in the Reverenda Fabbrica di San

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Pietro, present each flower in a splendid individual portrait. Only the conspicuous prices distinguished them, perhaps, from the portraits of beautiful women that graced many a seventeenth-century gallery. *Tulipmania* presents a whole range of tulip-inspired allegories, from Joris Hoefnagel's stunningly realistic still-life *Allegory on the Brevity of Life*, painted in 1591, with its caterpillars, butterflies, mayflies, roses, and a tulip, to the crudely printed broadsides that followed on the crash of 1637, the same broadsides that created what is really the myth of tulip mania, with all the resonant power of suggestion that myth can muster. To go mad over flowers may have made no rational sense, but it provided the perfect picture of irrationality.

Eventually, Dutch tulip prices would have had to find their equilibrium: the heights they reached in 1636 were an experimental extreme. But two outside factors, as Goldgar shows convincingly, made the market's abrupt shifts in February 1637 look like a cataclysm. The first was an outbreak of bubonic plague that erupted in 1636, bringing on its usual train of death and panic, but also an unusual number of wills whose provisions involved tulip bulbs and tulip transactions. The second was that the crash came in Carnival season, with its ritual rebellion against every kind of propriety. In a culture as carefully regulated as that of Holland, carnival craziness provided a crucial outlet for social tensions, but even when regulated by calendar and ceremony, the topsy-turvy carnival world was as disconcerting as a painting by Breughel or Bosch. In a plague year, those tensions and those discomfitures were all the greater, compounded by real fears that this time God's wrath would be implacable.

Tulips simply provided these long-standing aspects of the human condition with an irresistible symbol, just as the intangible evanescence of the Internet recently lent a certain suggestive aura to a similar quick shift in dot-com prices. The real problem, as this arresting book concludes, lies not in tulips, nor even in capitalism, but in ourselves—in the elusive but persistent ways in which we ascribe value to people, or things, or ideas. In the meantime we are lucky that the sandbars of Holland still burst into bloom every spring, as they have now for nearly four centuries, in ways that are more easily explained but, for all that, no less marvelous. ◆

Helen Vendler
WE SHALL BE HAPPY

FRANK O'HARA: SELECTED POEMS
Edited by Mark Ford
(Knopf, 266 pp., $30)

The poet Frank O'Hara is buried under a gravestone bearing a phrase from his poem "In Memory of My Feelings": "Grace to be born and live as variously as possible." Fate contrived that O'Hara should be born various: he had the mind and the heart of a musician, an art critic, and a poet. He himself took care of living variously—as sibling, friend, traveler, partygoer, lover. In his short life—he died in 1966 at forty, in an automobile accident—O'Hara wrote hundreds of poems, first assembled as a whole in 1971 in the *Collected Poems*, edited by Donald Allen and introduced by John Ashbery. That large volume turned out to be far from complete, and was later supplemented by *Early Writing* and *Poems Retrieved*, both published in 1977. In 1974, Knopf issued a winning *Selected Poems*, which has now been replaced by this fine volume, chosen and introduced by the admirable English poet Mark Ford, himself an expert in the work of the eccentric French novelist Raymond Roussel and in the poetry of John Ashbery.

Just as Eliot brought Baudelaire, Laforgue, and Nerval into English verse at the beginning of the century, so O'Hara vivified it with later French poetry from Rimbaud to Apollinaire: "My heart is in my / pocket, it is Poems by Pierre Reverdy." In this selection of almost 150 poems, Ford intelligently exhibits O'Hara's French aspect along with his American one. In "Digression on *Number 1*, 1948," (which was not included in Allen's selection), O'Hara scans art works at MoMA:

> A fine day for seeing. I see
> ceramics, during lunch hour, by
> Miró, and I see the sea by Léger;
> light, complicated Metzingers
> and a rude awakening by Brauner,
> a little table by Picasso, pink.

But the climax of this worldly poem arrives when O'Hara sees—after all these European works—an American one, the painting enigmatically named in the title of the poem: "There is the Pollock, white, harm / will not fall, his perfect hand." The incident might serve as a parable for O'Hara's writing: his heart is not only with Reverdy and Picasso, but also with Pollock and other contemporary American painters, many of them his friends.

O'Hara's life, always an intensely social one, was certainly lived in the company of artists (most of them abstract expressionists). Yet his interaction with them may have served, as fellow poet James Schuyler suspected, less as inspiration than as profitable distraction:

> Perhaps the kindest (and it may even be true) way of seeing it would be along the lines of what Pasternak says about life creating incidents to divert our attention from it so that it can get on with the work it can only accomplish unobserved.

Since O'Hara's poems document so many details about his adult life—the New York scene, various lovers, the art world, parties, and so on—and are so charming, irreverent, blithe, and original, it was only gradually that other qualities of their author, the less insouciant ones—his anxiety, his depression, his learning—became apparent to his readers. His literary learning had real depth: he had absorbed English and American poetry from Chaucer through Eliot, and his delight in French poems was a heartfelt one. Lorca, Machado, Benn, Rilke, Pasternak, and many other foreign poets turn up in O'Hara's verse. As a graduate student at the University of Michigan, his prize-entry pseudonym was "Pablo Pasternak."

In O'Hara's witty writing, opposites become identities, and contrasts become analogies. We observe, rapidly cross-pollinating each other, Europe and America, painting and poetry, affection and cruising, drunkenness and wit, love and jealousy, nervousness and confidence. O'Hara's mercurial presence in life—affectionately attested to in letters and memoirs—had its dark side: alcoholism, sex with strangers, ruptures with friends. The summary of existence that appears on Elizabeth Bishop's gravestone—"awful but cheerful"—suits O'Hara's life, too.

O'Hara's poetry seems at first inextricable from the life, and the early evalua-

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tions of his complex body of work tended, understandably, to be for the most part biographical and contextual. Perhaps now, with the passing of the years and their legends, it is possible to judge O'Hara as a poet without relying principally on the well-worn tales of his beginnings in Grafton, Massachusetts, the death of his father during his undergraduate days at Harvard, his eventual move to New York, his ever-changing circle of friends, his work as a curator at the Museum of Modern Art, his untimely death. Perhaps we can look at him freshly—not anxiously "placing" him in one tradition or another, whether the tribe of Blake or the tribe of Whitman or "the New York School"—but rather seeing what an O'Hara poem contributes to our literature, and what it can be for people who are not New Yorkers, and not even Americans. Mark Ford's new selection (offering more of the later work than Allen's *Selected*) ought to enable a further round of judgment, carried out less by those of us for whom this volume is a reprise than by the young, who may now enjoy the truly effervescent pleasure of reading O'Hara for the first time.

Of course New Yorkers reading O'Hara will always find their city lit by the intimate glow of his poems, and gay readers will be glad of his often joyous scenes—from contemplative to frenetic—of gay society. But there are many other appealing aspects to O'Hara, who has emerged as one of the most original American poets of his time. Consider, for example, O'Hara's light way with a narrative. He referred, in his mock-manifesto *Personism*, to his "I do this, I do that" poems, the telltale comma suggesting a serendipitous tumble from phase to phase, moment to moment. This casual and jaunty form obscures, but ultimately discloses, what O'Hara rightly called "the catastrophe of my personality":

> Now I am quietly waiting for
> the catastrophe of my personality
> to seem beautiful again,
> and interesting, and modern.
>
> The country is grey and
> brown and white in trees,
> snows and skies of laughter
> always diminishing, less funny
> not just darker, not just grey.
>
> It may be the coldest day of
> the year, what does he think of
> that? I mean, what do I? And if I do,
> perhaps I am myself again.

The poet's ironically enunciated yearnings for a better erotic future—when someone will find him "beautiful . . . , / and interesting, and modern"—are here rapidly undone by the decline from a happy winter of laughter, open skies, and snow into a bewildered darkness and a colder air. The precipitating event is left unspecified, until the closing flurry of confusion shows that the formerly interfused selves of two lovers ("what does he think of / that? I mean, what do I?") have fallen apart. O'Hara's self-correcting minimalist wit drops from the symbolic gray winter into the "philosophical" question of the boundaries between the self and another.

Renate Ponsold, *Frank O'Hara*, c. 1964

This kind of skidding—from hyperbolic self-irony to a darkening climate, from Keatsian perplexity to the recovery of balance—keeps us alert and listening as we read an O'Hara poem. The passage just quoted resembles in form a classical *lied*: a disturbing situation, then a faltering into a minor key, then a clearer articulation of the original predicament. O'Hara was an accomplished pianist who intended to be a composer before he found poetry; and his poems are often reminiscent of a known musical structure—a fanfare, a duet, a sonata, a fugue.

O'Hara's genially dramatic narratives entertain not only by their rapidity and their fervent colloquiality, but also by their metaphorical wit. New York cabs, yellow and black, like bumblebees, are "hum-colored"; past pastoral life in pastures, in O'Hara's alliterative joke, is "an innocent past of perverted acts in pastures"; a piano has "black and white teeth"; a lamppost bends over the traffic "pensively like a / praying mantis." Such intuitions—sometimes surreal, sometimes not—accumulate as the poem expands, creating within its airy lightness the gleam of symbolic constellations. O'Hara introduced into American poetry a lightness not found among his predecessors. Even Berryman's alter ego Henry, in spite of his comic role as id, has a mournfulness behind his Chaplinesque antics. Only John Ashbery, O'Hara's closest friend, exhibits a comparable lightness of comedy, but his poems are more philosophical and intellectual than O'Hara's.

Another of O'Hara's talents—and this may be more important to younger poets than his rapid way with narrative—is an exquisite ear. The cadences of conversation are sometimes the sole beauty of a painful poem. When O'Hara forsakes his cascades of metaphor for a stringent simplicity, he can make a brief dialogue stand in for the lonely circumstances of a single gay man hoping to arrange a rendezvous by telephone, and then finding his anticipation rebuffed. A telephone dialogue between two uncertain men (one at home, one elsewhere, trying to confirm a possible meeting) is titled, wryly, "Metaphysical Poem"—a poem unable to gain the desired physical encounter. The piece seems artless—but try to name the tones that the poem evokes and you realize its cunning. The pronouns that linguists call "shifters"—"I," "me," "you," "we"—merge and divide, as the will to meet waxes and wanes; similarly, "there" and "any place" are tossed back and forth, over against "somewhere" and "home." The two desirable places in this lover's complaint are "home" and

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"here"—places desolatingly seen, as the poem ends, to be unattainable. Here is "Metaphysical Poem," with its intricate interchanges:

> When do you want to go
> I'm not sure I want to go there
> where do you want to go
> any place
> I think I'd fall apart any place else
> well I'll go if you really want to
> I don't particularly care
> but you'll fall apart any place else
> I can just go home
> I don't really mind going there
> but I don't want to force you to go there
> you won't be forcing me I'd just as soon
> I wouldn't be able to stay long anyway
> maybe we could go somewhere nearer
> I'm not wearing a jacket
> just like you weren't wearing a tie
> well I didn't say we had to go
> I don't care whether you're wearing one
> we don't really have to do anything
> well all right let's not
> okay I'll call you
> yes call me

Such a poem hints at O'Hara's fondness for Gertrude Stein's linguistic experiments, but it is more moving, in its hapless repetitions of the lovers' evasions, than Stein usually managed to be. Of course an actual conversation would not, when transcribed, sound like this. It is up to O'Hara to imagine the poetically ideal inarticulacy, the minimalist choreography of the back-and-forth of possibility and disappointment. The confidence of the eager lover's opening—"When do you want to go"—is immediately dashed: "I'm not sure I want to go there" says the less eager, "difficult," other. And so the plot unrolls down the page, undoing the plan, undoing the lover, ending in that tenuous "call me." One could set this to music as a duet of stand-off, its form of distant intimacy foreseen in O'Hara's spoof of aesthetic creation in his mock-manifesto "Personism":

> I was in love with someone. . . . I went back to work and wrote a poem for this person. While I was writing it I was realizing that if I wanted to I could use the telephone instead of writing the poem, and so Personism was born.

The *reductio ad absurdum* of "Metaphysical Poem"—as the love complaint is brought down to a first-grade vocabulary—is one of O'Hara's favorite lexical moves, and generates many of his best short poems, from the famous diary-like jottings of "A Step Away From Them" and "Poem" ("Lana Turner has collapsed!") to the wry embarrassments of "First Dances." In "First Dances," the classical hauteur of dance is rudely diminished in a teenager's first dance, held at his school (where, the poem tells us, the antiquated word "cloakroom" survives). The poem opens in the hilarity of alcoholic expectation, but it ends in trepidation:

> The punch bowl was near the
> cloakroom
> so the pints could be taken out of the
> boys' cloaks and dumped into the
> punch.
> . . . .
> It is easy to
> dance it is even easy to dance together
> sometimes. We were very young
> and ugly
> we knew it, everybody knew it.

The sheer waywardness of the thought-process here is adolescent. The joke ("the boys' cloaks") is followed (after subsequent mentions of hysteria, fear, and giggling) by the delighted discovery that it is easy to dance, and the even more heady revelation that "it is even easy to dance together"—but immediately adolescent glumness and self-consciousness move in with the horrible word "ugly," and social anxiety kills off the joy of young bodies moving together.

O'Hara, assisted by Rimbaud, remembered the exuberance and the shame of adolescence better than any other modern American poet. And whereas "First Dances" is one of the characteristic poems of lexical reduction, "Blocks"—a piece about childhood turning into adolescence—is, by contrast, full of O'Hara's equally characteristic buoyancy and excess. I quote the poem's second and third parts:

> 2
> O boy, their childhood was like so many
> oatmeal cookies.
> I need you, you need me, yum, yum.
> Anon it became suddenly
>
> 3
> like someone always losing something
> and never knowing what.
> Always so. They were so fond of eating
> bread and butter and
> sugar, they were slobs, the mice used to
> lick the floorboards
> after they went to bed, rolling their
> light tails against
> the rattling marbles of granulation.
> Vivo! the dextrose
> those children consumed, lavished,
> smoked, in their knobby

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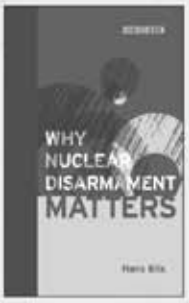

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candy bars. Such pimples! such
hardons! such moody loves.
And thus they grew like giggling
fir trees.

Dancing on his thin line between pure energy (in the atomic collisions of words) and pure simplicity (in a scrupulous honesty of expression), O'Hara often succeeded, but sometimes he wrote too much. The roller-coaster ride of his longer poems—Ford has left out the longest ones, such as the 600-line "Oranges"—can be wearying, as showing-off adulterates structure, and "spontaneity" becomes willed. The coterie poems about John and Kenneth and Bunny and Vincent and Joe and their favorite bars have an in-group joy that may not outlast their generation, though they may survive as a form of retro pleasure. In the many glimpses of his friends in such poems, O'Hara often seems to be coming upon metaphors that also fit himself. He cries, to the poet Kenneth Koch,

Kenneth you are really the backbone of
a tremendous poetry nervous system
which keeps sending messages along
the wireless luxuriance
of distraught experiences and hysterical
desires so to keep things humming
and have nothing go off the trackless
tracks
and once more you have balanced me
precariously
on the wilderness wish
of wanting to be everything to
everybody everywhere.

The portrait of Larry Rivers triumphing over the boringly banal parts of American culture also fits O'Hara, if one substitutes the word "poetry" for "painting": "He is always engaged in an esthetic athleticism which sharpens the eye, hand and arm in order to beat the bugaboos of banality and boredom, deliberately invited into the painting and then triumphed over."

Approaching forty, "wanting to be everything to everybody everywhere," O'Hara filled his life up with activities and people—curating shows for MoMA, writing catalogs, tossing off handfuls of poems, going to openings, collaborating on projects with artists, telephoning his innumerable acquaintances. Ashbery mentions in his introduction to the *Collected Poems* that it was hard for friends to see O'Hara alone, since he so often surrounded himself with people. O'Hara himself did not see how he could grow up and yet remain himself. Many of his friends had married, and although he was a welcome visitor in their houses, they were lost to the original bohemian groups where he had known them. He drank more and more, to the worry of all.

Brought up a Roman Catholic, an unwilling student in parochial schools run by the Sisters of Mercy and the Xaverian Brothers, O'Hara threw off religion in spite of his mother's disapproval. His adolescent rebelliousness led to his adult candor, another vigorous feature of his poetry. In "Homosexuality" (a poem not included in the earlier *Selected Poems*), he begins sarcastically, "So we are taking off our masks, are we, and keeping / our mouths shut?" and then goes on to object, in a Whitmanian gesture, to the closet of the shut mouth: "It is the law of my own voice I shall investigate." Finally, as if to take candor to its most candid, he enumerates, in a serio-comic Whitmanian catalogue, various New York locales of homosexual cruising, "tallying up the merits of each / of the latrines" but preferring, to latrines and parks and railway stations, the out-of-the-way corners of the Metropolitan Museum:

14th Street is drunken
and credulous,
53rd tries to tremble but is too at rest.
The good

love a park and the inept a railway
station,
and there are the divine ones who
drag themselves up

and down the lengthening shadow
of an Abyssinian head
in the dust, trailing their long elegant
heels of hot air

crying to confuse the brave "It's a
summer day,
and I want to be wanted more than
anything else in the world."

Knowing what happened when HIV struck years later, we now read O'Hara's poems of erotic longing with a pang: the innocence of O'Hara's twenties seems lost forever.

One form of that innocence drew him, from his childhood, to movies, and in his relish of the enthusiastic naïveté of the young, he could recreate the thrill of Hollywood, especially when, in mock idolatry, he celebrated the fame of film stars. That representation of innocence, and O'Hara's inspired parodies of it, issue in tones uniquely his. The poem called "To the Film Industry in Crisis"—a catalogue of "the great, the near-great, the featured, the extras"—begins with a winsome overture: "you, Motion Picture Industry, / it's you I love!" O'Hara adores the absurdities of the movies, not only "Eric von Stroheim, the seducer of mountain-climbers' gasping spouses" and other such stars and plots, but also the immovable conventions of the form: "Gloria Swanson reclining, / and Jean Harlow reclining and wiggling, and Alice Faye reclining / and wiggling and singing." O'Hara's own perpetual performance as an entertainer of others allies him with the fantasy world of film desire, where sex is the motive and success alternates with "tragedy" ("Cornel Wilde coughing blood on the piano keys while Merle Oberon berates").

The playful social comedy of O'Hara's "rococo / self" has to be weighed against his passages of tense self-scrutiny—analytical confessions linking him to such fellow poets as Lowell and Plath and Berryman. In "Joe's Jacket," set in the midst of the "enormous party" of life, O'Hara sees into, and sees through, his compulsive drinking and socializing:

I drink to smother my sensitivity for
a while so I won't stare away
I drink to kill the fear of boredom,
the mounting panic of it
I drink to reduce my seriousness
so a certain spurious charm
can appear and win its flickering little
victory over noise
I drink to die a little and increase the
contrast of this questionable
moment
and then I am going home, purged of
everything except anxiety and self
distrust

After such expense of spirit, O'Hara feels again the hopeless wish to stop life in its tracks and remain forever boyish, but skepticism mars his desire:

and surely we shall not continue to
be unhappy
we shall be happy
but we shall continue to be ourselves
everything continues to be possible
René Char, Pierre Reverdy, Samuel
Beckett it is possible isn't it
I love Reverdy for saying yes, though
I don't believe it

Even in such times of exhaustion, O'Hara's fountain of original metaphor—his greatest claim to distinction—springs up afresh. When, in early middle age, he lies in bed on a windy morning seeing

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out the window "the beautiful desperation of a tree / fighting off strangulation," that beautiful desperation is his own. The threat to the poet's throat (and his poetry) appears elsewhere: "it is all suffocating." Yet three years before his death, his mood of grim stoicism—his feeling of being "dried out, balled up, anxious and empty"—can, even so, be persuaded into responsiveness by a gift of a Keatsian basil tree from a friend. A paradoxical admission follows: O'Hara, momentarily solaced, gains not exactly an improvement but a different angle of vision: he sees

> that everything is impossible in a
> different way
> well so what, but there's a difference
> between a window and a wall again.

One slab of the enclosing wall of depression evanesces, and the window that replaces it lets light into the prison chamber. Nothing could seem simpler than these closing lines in which a wall becomes a window, but only a powerful imagination, a habit of forthrightness, and a way with words could convey so simply the clarification that magically allows light into a dark and confined mental state. O'Hara's unexpected minglings of liveliness and dailiness, of conversational cadence and erotic vivacity, of brave candor and farcical comedy, inform his irrepressible and panoramic movie-in-words of American modernity. A smaller *Selected Poems* in paperback could be the heart in someone's pocket, O'Hara as the American Reverdy. ◆

Francesca Mari
COSMIC REALISM

THE BOYS IN THE TREES
By Mary Swan
(Holt Paperbacks, 224 pp., $14)

Words have become too self-conscious, too anxious, to sit still on the page. In a world blaring with YouTube videos and buzzing with blog posts, there is, especially in fiction, an apparent need to justify the extended use of text. Why write a story when you can film one? Why read when you can watch? Writers, when they react to this new instability, tend either to defiantly renounce the page or to defensively embrace it. There are the novels, always increasing in number, that comply with the rush, and eclipse or fragment language and compress plot into as few words as possible. These mysteries and romances may elicit emotion, but they rarely restructure the world. They are an entertainment to keep pace with the chaos. At the most extreme, cell phone novels—novels literally thumbed on a cell phone and distributed to and read on millions of others—accounted for five of Japan's ten 2007 best-sellers. With chapters averaging around seventy words, they can be read alongside life—you can read the first chapter on the way from your office to the restroom, and finish the whole book before you flush. Gone is the ancient scruple that reading should be an interruption in existence.

And then there are novels that fight the rush, that not only interrupt existence but aspire to overtake and even transfigure it. Instead of aping the technological torrent, these books wish to reinstate, and to reproduce, natural rhythms. In a review of Annie Dillard's *The Maytrees* last summer, Marilynne Robinson wrote that "its sea is wild and generative, its sky orders the constellations, and both are primordial, archaic, full of the fact of time past and persisting, unchanging, changing everything. If there were such a thing as cosmic realism, *The Maytrees* would be a classic of the genre." Robinson's labeling is cautious—perhaps because it approaches self-categorization. But the classification is inspired. In contemporary fiction, there is indeed such a thing as cosmic realism. It encompasses a range of description-driven novels steeped in transience and obsessed with iterations of ephemerality. Their substance is more thought than action, and the thought is almost as much perception as it is reflection. John Banville, Susan Minot, Per Petterson, and the essayist Jo Ann Beard have cosmic realist elements, as does Mary Swan's *The Deep and Other Stories*. And if Dillard is a classic of this genre, then Robinson's chiseled fiction is canonical.

Dillard—whose central characters have nothing but a shack and days that swell with time, and want nothing but the company of their thoughts—presses upon her cast the tides of the environment: "Sometimes by day or night he heard them breathe old as oceans—experienced." Robinson—whose first novel is about a transient who settles in Fingerbone, Idaho to care for her two orphaned nieces, and whose second is written as a letter from an ailing pastor to his seven-year-old son—populates both books with characters who incorporate natural beats into the rhythms of their daily routines:

> Sylvie took her coffee with two lumps of sugar, Helen liked her toast dark, and Molly took hers without butter. These things were known. Molly changed the beds, Sylvie peeled the vegetables, Helen washed the dishes. These things were settled.... This perfect quiet had settled into their house after the death of their father. That event had troubled the very medium of their lives. Time and air and sunlight bore wave and wave of shock, until all the shock was spent, and time and space and light grew still again and nothing seemed to tremble....

Whether the rhythms are environmental or ritual, whether they are explicable or not, they ground the book in reality in a way that the characters themselves are sometimes incapable of doing. For in their interior efforts to appreciate time, cosmic realist characters often slip away from it—they lose the traction of ordinary life and spiral off into the depths of their thoughts. It is for just that reason that the twin protagonists of Swan's "The Deep" describe a morning disembodiment that lasts "until you splash your face with cold water and recognize it again in the mirror above the basin. Until you drink a cup of tea, breathe fresh air, let routine tasks draw you back."

On the basis of these rhythms, the cosmic realist novel develops a distinct syntax of its own. Typically, the prose is lyrical and crisp—rich without being lavish, sumptuous but not florid. These books find the fewest strokes with which to paint the freshest image. "She watched blue shadows on his white shirt stretch and shrink as he moved," Dillard writes. But the economy of language is not merely pretty. It calls to mind the classical Chinese poets—like them, commanding attention by demanding it. This prose promises to be experienced as poetry. It engrosses when it engages.

Cosmic realism is not altogether new. Its modern ancestors were, in their ways, Woolf and Proust. Lingering over common objects, Proust traced their every emotional evocation; and Woolf, with deft angularity, was a pioneer in the aestheticization of

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consciousness, while also letting objects do the work of documenting time. (In the experimental "Time Passes" interlude of *To the Lighthouse*, the sensations of the winds over the household objects completely upstage the characters.) But more generally, cosmic realism is the late descendant of the Romantic and Transcendentalist traditions. Glorifying the ordinary and the outcast, the Romantics believed that natural objects unlocked the poet's spirit. "The passions that build up our human Soul," Wordsworth wrote in *The Prelude*, "Not with the mean and vulgar works of man, / But with high objects, with enduring things, / With life and nature, purifying thus / The elements of feeling and of thought, / And sanctifying, by such discipline, Both pain and fear; until we recognize / A grandeur in the beatings of the heart." The Romantics devoted themselves to the religion of individual aesthetic: literature was a self-originating and self-organizing process through which a writer sought, and sought to exude, his or her true identity. And one formulated this unique identity partially through original perceptions of the external world. "I have at all times endeavored," Wordsworth said, "to look steadily at my subject." By investing such an intensity of attention—by really looking—the Romantics hoped to discover the inner truth of an object, what Hopkins later called the "inscape," which divested the object of its subservience to scientific law and imbued it with its own life.

The Transcendentalists believed that intuition was the source of truth, and that individual perception illuminated the structures of the world. "In proportion to the completeness of the distillation," Emerson declared in "The American Scholar," "so will the purity and imperishableness of the product be." By capturing the essence of an object, Transcendentalist writers believed they could preserve it. But the Transcendentalists also strove to savor the moment. Admitting the difficulty of this, Thoreau, who rapturously studied natural objects and quotidian activities, wrote in *Walden*—an inspiration, certainly, for Dillard's numinous shacks—that "I have been anxious to improve the nick of time, and notch it on my stick too; to stand at the meeting of two eternities, the past and future, which is precisely the present moment; to toe that line." Improving the nick of time meant, with an awareness of past and future, focusing attention on the present.

Thoreau's declaration that "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach" could serve as the credo not only of many a Transcendentalist, but also of many a cosmic realist writer or character. Walt Whitman's poetics inspired R. M. Bucke's theory of "cosmic consciousness," whereby all matter had an eternal life that contributed to a cosmos-spanning collective consciousness. A lecture Robinson gave at Amherst last year, reprinted in this month's *Harper's*, echoes this camaraderie of spirit. "I have always felt that people somehow immortalize themselves in a landscape," she says, "that the mere fact of a specific human presence in a place leaves it changed. Walt Whitman was right about everything, never more so than when he celebrated the epic and melancholy beauty created in a place by all the transient multitudes and generations that pass through it."

While the cosmic realist mode of capture is more measured than the spontaneous exuberance of its forbears, cosmic realists believe that the forces of man and environment push against each other, so that a certain truth emerges from the natural organization of the writer's perception. "I do try to write the way I think," the pastor John Ames says in Robinson's *Gilead*. The statement is not much different from what Robinson told *The New York Times* about her own writing: "You devote your life to books, and then in a way they sort of become what they will be.... It's a strange thing."

"Strange thing" is a signature phrase of Robinson's. In *Gilead* it appears six times within a hundred pages, and feels implied on many more. And throughout the book, "strange" makes no less than twenty-five appearances—only a few more than "remarkable," which has twenty-two mentions, and a few less than "wonderful," which has twenty-eight. The profusion of such words continues the Romantic and Transcendentalist tradition of turning to a religion of personal impressions in revolt against the prosaic realisms of science and sociology. In cosmic realism, science actually fascinates, but the attempt to discover the deepest truths moves beyond it, into the spiritualized self. "Everything that falls upon the eye is apparition, a sheet dropped over the world's true workings," Robinson writes in *Housekeeping*. "The nerves and the brain are tricked, and one is left with dreams that these specters loose their hands from ours and walk away, the curve of the back and the swing of the coat so familiar as to imply that they should be permanent fixtures of the world, when in fact nothing is more perishable."

ANTHONY RUSSO

To cope with expiration, the cosmic realists employ Romantic and Transcendentalist tactics. They fight the tyranny of time with the authenticity of description and the acuity of personal perception. The drive to document the perception of an object at a particular moment is in part the desire to be able to compare it with later perceptions and therein visualize the passage of time. But cosmic realism sometimes lacks the assurance of its ancestors. Emerson believed in the prophet-like power of individual vision precisely because he believed in the unity of creation and the inherent goodness of mankind: he had a philosophy, a metaphysical faith. Works of cosmic realism, by contrast, tend to address tragedies that shake this sort of faith. An unknowable providence pervades all things—borne with a complex optimism in Robinson, with acquiescence in Dillard, and with resignation in Swan.

One of the more recent contributions to the genre, Mary Swan's first novel, *The Boys in the Trees*, is more tragic than most. After William and Naomi Heath's three children succumb to diphtheria, they take a ship from England to Canada, where they do their best to raise a new family, two little girls named Lilian and Rachel. Pieced together from multiple perspectives over three generations, the novel repeatedly disorients the reader. That is, the text mimics its content, the continual dislodgment of the principal family. The stuttering of life takes a devastating toll on its characters. William is a good father, but his desire to make his family more comfortable leads him to embezzle money. After his first charge, the family relocates further north. When he is accused a second time, Naomi, bewildered, says, "I can't bear it, to start again." And so William does something to ensure that she will never have to: he murders his family, a crime so unexpected that the majority of the novel is about the community's struggles to make sense of it.

William acts out of a fear of failure beaten into him by the violence of his own father. But whence his father's rage springs, we will never know. Evil simply subsists in this universe, and although roots may

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be traced and leaves located on a stem, the seed itself is lost to the terrain. The repercussive tragedies, like most tragedies, saturate the novel silently, supplying the realism to the cosmic. The gun, the one William uses to murder his family, never sounds. It sits on the porch, "a small package . . . a lumpy letter L," curiously noticed by the choleric daughter on whom it will later be fired. The next time we see it, it is lying limp in William's bloodied hand, out in the forest where he slumps at the root of a tree. It is as if the two still frames compel the action that links them, like a flipbook of line drawings, lovely and sparse, which our mind is left to animate. (Wordsworth: "Thou Soul that art the eternity of thought, / That giv'st to forms and images a breath / And everlasting Motion!") And *this* is how cosmic realism seizes our attention—not by piquing curiosity but by engaging the imagination. The scene that would be drawn out into the climax of, say, a thriller is in the cosmic realist novel left an open invitation to the reader.

Sentences do even more of this work than scenes. As the doctor's son watches William's hanging in horror, "sometimes everything pulsed with a rasping sound, sometimes just the black comma shape, swaying a little at the end of a thick rope." Swan's diction does not succumb to emotion. It remains even-keeled and aesthetically removed, while visually imparting an ominous pause—a comma, so to speak. By overlapping the two incongruous images of the hanging man and the punctuation, Swan defamiliarizes both, so that only an application of the imagination can reconcile them into a single head-slumped silhouette. Jo Ann Beard describes violence with a similarly seductive calm in her essay "Werner," writing that "deep inside the walls, three floors below Werner's apartment, a sprig of cloth-wrapped wire sizzled and then opened, like a blossom." And in Robinson's *Housekeeping* "the engine nosed over toward the lake and then the rest of the train, slid after it into the water like a weasel sliding off a rock." The incongruous aestheticization of tragedy challenges the reader to visualize the events and thereby to identify them. The inevitable bursting of the fuse and the hapless slippage of the train are understood, with a delightful snap, only after they play themselves out in the mind's eye.

The delightful snap is the experience of being pleasantly startled. As Robinson observes of Dillard's *The Maytrees*, "there is a resolute this-worldliness that startles the reader again and again with recognition." To startle is to seize attention and fix it in the present moment. The thrill of successful recognition—"How much we overlook! What a world this is, after all!" exclaims Robinson—is, at bottom, the thrill of wonder. Wonder effuses in the immediate, most viscerally from familiar objects perceived and presented in unfamiliar ways. While cell phone novels deal in curiosity, a passion forever forward-thinking, which expires as soon as it is spent, cosmic realism deals in wonder, a passion of the immediate moment, one that continually regenerates intrigue. Even when dealing with the past, as these books so often do, the unique descriptions secure the reader's attention firmly in the instant. Cosmic realism invokes wonder not to press forward, but to repossess time for the present.

The Boys in the Trees has more plot than most cosmic realist novels, but because it is told in spurts, from multiple perspectives across a multitude of temporal registers, it does not feel driven by its events. Instead, objects possess an uncanny agency. Every other chapter, in fact, takes its cue from a central thing after which it is named—"Locket," "Gun," "House," "Button," "Knife," "Book." Here objects become vessels of time. "Time," Francisco Orlando observes in *Obsolete Objects in the Literary Imagination*, "makes things become cherished by force of habit and ease of handling, endows them with tenderness as memories and with authority as models, marks them with the virtue of rarity and the prestige of age." Of course time also inures by force of habit, strips objects of the memories they once cast, and taints them with the worthlessness of overabundance and the stigma of age. And so the perception of objects, varying over time across these extremes, encapsulates the full range of experience: power and powerlessness; determinacy and indeterminacy; worth and worthlessness.

To convey the impress of time, Swan archives objects—or more specifically, her characters' perception of objects. In "The Deep," she writes, "It began to seem, after a time, that everyone had something. One thing they'd seen or heard that they couldn't shake off, that they carried, would carry forever, like a hard, dull stone in the heart.... We thought if we could gather those things together, we would call it *The War Book*. And that

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would be the only way to communicate it, to give someone an idea of how it was." The same impulse has been applied in Swan's novel. Not only are her characters inclined to concretize experience—William Heath's younger daughter, Rachel, illustrates a family book, while her best friend Eaton, the doctor's son, as an adult considers "leaving a record for his children, something they would one day be glad to have"—but throughout the book Swan records their concretizations for them. Lilian, the elder daughter, who is haunted by the past, notes that "My father brought home a blotter, tucked under his coat, for the surface of the table is uneven, scarred and gouged by people we've never known.... I wonder about the families.... Marks of their anger, their errors, the only things we have to know them by." She also describes, a little too preciously, "the little front room that was filled, like the whole house, with things other people had left behind. The worn spot on the arm of the settee where she sat sewing, the spot rubbed bare by a stranger's hand."

The trauma of loss, in particular, draws objects into relief against their surroundings. Recalling his wife's death, the elder Eaton "imagined that she had closed her eyes when the ambulance doors clicked shut, but at the time his mind was swept bare, only able to notice small, discrete things." The mind in distress absents itself from the fluidity of life and arbitrarily hangs on to things found in one's visual field, to fragments. When the novel flashes back to Eaton's childhood in the next chapter, Eaton is to be a pallbearer in Rachel's funeral. That morning, he nearly faints into his oatmeal: "Everything looked strangely sharp-edged, the sound of the cutlery echoing, the sound of Lucy's footsteps." Trauma draws discrete lines around the objects in Eaton's perception, as if trying to offer visual grips so that he may cling to consciousness. More habitually and extremely disturbed, Lilian has visions of her parents' previous children. But unable to cling to reality, her visions escape form. "The way I saw them," she says, "hard to explain, something like a thought that ravels away when you try to catch hold of it."

In order to archive experience so personal that it defies description, Swan reifies it into a vague shape—sometimes a curve, but often nothing more distinct or concrete than the word "shape" itself. Lilian maps her weekly routine against the contour of a mount: "Wednesdays at eleven o'clock I go across the road to Dr. Robinson, and I see the week like a hill now, sloping up to a peak and then sliding down again." Naomi similarly says of her first family, "I often thought, when Sadie was small, how I had my own mother until I was almost three. I thought of the things Sadie and I said to each other, of the shape of our days, the little games we played, and I couldn't believe that if I were to die, she would keep nothing of that."

Of course Naomi doesn't die; Sadie does. And her loss, along with the loss of her two brothers, presses almost supernaturally upon the daughter Naomi next conceives, the daughter to whom Naomi is subsequently "as close as thought." "Even if she doesn't know the details of all my secrets," Lilian says of her mother, "she knows their shape." In Swan's book, to recognize the shapes in another's thoughts is to forge, through understanding, an emotional bond. So when Rachel's teacher seeks to understand the emotions that led to her murder, the teacher looks to the little girl's drawings and tries to parse out the shapes. "Through the front windows, one up, two down, she sketched hazy shapes in one of the pictures, a glimpse of what was inside. Try as she might, Alice can't make out what the shapes are supposed to be." Sometimes the reader finds herself in a similar position, with an unsatisfying feeling of depth intimated but not explored.

The most literal cosmic realist object would seem to be the souvenir, which has no inherent status, no brand from which to glean its worth. A souvenir is only as valuable as it is emotionally effective; it owes its value to time, not to money. "Souvenir," after all, refers literally to actual remembrances—to ideas rather than objects, and it is when these souvenirs are used in this way that they are beautiful. Of the schoolteacher, Swan writes that her crush, the photographer, "asked her once how old she was, laughed and said he'd have to wait for her, and she wrapped the idea around herself like the woolen shawl." By transmuting the idea into an object, even a mental one, Alice can better covet it.

But with souvenirs that are actual objects, Swan sometimes overdoes it. In trying to imbue her novel with profundity, she amasses trinkets like a tourist anxious to fill a charm bracelet. There are all the clichés—photographs and buttons and books; a father's watch and a porcelain clock. There is Naomi's locket, containing the locks of the children she lost: "When she takes the locket off, she feels the empty space near her heart and as she gets older and her fingers thicken and stiffen it takes longer to do the clasp again, longer to feel that first cold touch, to feel it begin to warm." And there is the poignant example of William's father's knife, the one William broke and supposedly buried as a child, knowing that the "beating for a broken knife would be worse than for one that was missing." After the murders, a townsperson finds it while carting things out of William's house to sell:

> It fell out from under a mattress, a folding knife with a yellowed bone handle, the tip broken off but the blade sharp, so sharp that his testing touch drew a thick line of blood that welled and darkened. Someone else might have wondered what it was doing there, might have called to the others, passed it around, and talk might have flickered through the town. But Bash just slipped it into his pocket, blotted his finger on the seam of his trousers and bent to heave the mattress again, last night's drink pounding in his head.... Bash just thought that he'd needed a knife and he'd found a knife, and that was the way things should work.

Unlike the locket, the knife is effective because it is couched in some of Swan's best details—Bash's wonderful blotting of the finger on the seam of his trousers, for instance. But after William's death, his knife is only a souvenir to the

Carwash

I love the iridescent tricolor slime
that squirts all over my Honda in random
yet purposeful patterns as I sit in the semi-
dark of the "touch-free" carwash with you.
Listening to the undercarriage blast, I think,
"Love changes and will not be commanded."
I smile at the long flesh-colored tentacles waving
at us like passengers waving good-bye.
Water isn't shaped like a river or ocean;
it mists invisibly against metal and glass.
In the corridor of green unnatural lights
recalling the lunatic asylum, how can I
defend myself against what I want?
Lay your head in my lap. Touch me.

HENRI COLE

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one person who retains any memory of it: the reader who can recall it from the novel's first chapter. And for the reader, the souvenir signifies something slightly different: not the memory itself as much as the humanity evident in William's having held onto it. Physical weight directly correlates with emotional weight. Despite William's refusal to discuss his childhood, the knife reveals his inability to suppress it.

But the weight of meaning that Swan imposes upon objects in her novel is sometimes too great for them to bear, and her book begins to suffer from its symbolism. The arbitrariness of destiny is annoyingly over-articulated in the symbol of the executioner's platform, which is made from "a tree that, growing, looked just like all the other ones around it, the ones that would make kitchen tables or a little boy's sled, the house that he lived in." Yes, without rhyme or reason this tree was given the power to punctuate life, was chosen to become the Ultimate Thing. We are only a step away from allegory here. Mr. Ultimate Thing pines and pines for Miss Profundity, who, to his great dismay, is soulmates with Mr. Subtlety. Oh, Mr. Subtlety! If only it weren't against his nature to exert his influence, how he would be appreciated here!

Much worse, however, is the chapter devoted to the "Button." The gimmicky teaser with which it opens—"There's nothing remarkable about it"—immediately contradicts itself with the overwriting that follows, all of which nonetheless does not dispel the unremarkableness. "It's only where it comes from that gives it meaning," Swan writes, "and how long will that last?" Teething on the rhetoric of reverse psychology, Swan insists that the button's power is fleeting in a naive attempt to make us think otherwise. "Still," she writes, "the button goes into a glass jar, and someone thinks, late at night, of the way that stories lose their meaning, just like objects do, as the years wheel on, as new ones take their place. Someone understands that this thought too will be gone and no one will know, no one will ever know." What was suggested so gracefully by aged objects is now mourned with a metaphysical righteousness. Swan's mind is sometimes too disposed to a kind of romantic reification. And so sometimes we get not profundity, but propaganda for profundity.

Explaining the rationale behind *The War Book* in "The Deep," Swan seems to offer her own interpretation of cosmic realism. "We all have those pictures in our heads," she writes, "those moments of memory caught and held, for some reason, and perhaps if we could string them all together they would make some sense of our lives." The onus of interpretation is left on the reader. And so too, more challengingly, is the onus of animation, of generating narrative momentum for oneself.

An exquisite example of it working on the micro level occurs in "The Deep." Of a wounded World War I soldier, heavily dosed with morphine, Swan writes,

> When he was—not awake, he was never that—but semiconscious, he repeated a list of words over and over. Oak, beech, ash, elm, maple, oak beech ash elm maple..... [A]t first they thought he was naming trees, but then someone heard *main* and someone heard *water* and they guessed he was reciting the names of streets, the names of streets in whatever town he came from. His company had been hit hard; those who survived had been moved on, and no one in the hospital knew yet what town it was. Some of the men on the ward thought it was a small place, that he was naming every street in the town. But most of them thought it was a route he was walking. Oak-Beech-Ash-Elm-Maple-Main-Water. The way to school, maybe, or the way to his girlfriend's house. The way to his own house from the station. Over and over he walked it, Oak-Beech-Ash-Elm-Maple-Main-Water, and after a while we could see it ourselves: the tall trees leaning over the sidewalks, the shady verandas, the storefronts on Main Street, the cooler air on Water. If it was evening, we could smell the blossoms.

Masterfully shuffling street names before our eyes, Swan offers an example of how to make the words unfold in the mind. Several times in *The Boys in the Trees*, she repeats the performance. But asking the reader to fill in the frames at a larger level, to activate one's own interest in the narrative when the gaps are large and the blanks are many, may be asking too much.

This novel that seems so polished is also in a deep way unfinished. Layering frames, while sometimes providing poignancy, does not always sufficiently develop a character. It is with the somewhat gimmicky first words "And then" that Swan first ushers us into the cosmos of her novel. The perimeters, which are thick with rounded characters, hollow out to a center populated by paper dolls on pickets. Abby, the maid whom Eaton's father rescued from sexual abuse and whom he ultimately must dismiss because she incites his own desire, is layered into nothing more than a tinny mouthpiece for trite doctrines. When she enters into an affair with the town photographer (for whom she is a live-in assistant), Swan grants Abby a whole chapter for her metaphysical musings on the magic of photography and her supposedly deep desire for ignorance. Fondly speaking back the words of her lover, she remarks, "That's the wonder of photography, a record of the world just as it is instead of someone's idea of it." Here Swan's interest in objects flattens her character into one.

In *The Boys in the Trees*, Swan's style, which she voices through old Eaton, is panoramic. "You realiz[e] that all along it had been a different answer," he says, "another person glimpsed but passed over, who was the key to everything. Whatever *everything* was." And so *The Boys in the Trees* lingers on subsidiary Abby-like characters; it tries to look at everyone and everything. But the lockets and the clocks and the dear, dear trees that bracket the book are pious icons of time's passage more than they are evocative objects. For every brilliant description—for every Bash blotting his finger on a seam or for every silhouette shaped like a comma—there is another either inauthentic or so burdened by its Profundity that wonder is arrested and can no longer float the narrative forward. The realism is betrayed by the cosmic, and the democratization of attention, instead of invigorating the landscape, merely wearies the mind. When wonder fails, objects fall flat, and the reader's interest wavers. Instead of enjoying the present moment, the reader begins to look to the future—to the end of the section, the chapter, the book itself. The reader begins, you might say, to wonder. ◆

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Washington Diarist

Jeremiads

I was tired of hearing Jeremiah Wright, so I started reading him. This did not improve matters. In his books I found mainly (in the words of one of his admirers) "Africentric Christian manhood," a panic about the situation of the African American male raised into a truculent paranoid theology. There are many expressions of love in Wright's preaching, but only for his own, which is not love's strongest test. In 1991, he inaugurated a series of sermons honoring Martin Luther King Jr., with a sermon called "Full of the Holy Spirit"—the next one in the series was "The Audacity to Hope"—in which there appears this flourish: "Don't let anybody trick you into thinking Minister Louis Farrakhan is your enemy. He ain't the enemy. Any African man who can clean folks up, get them off of dope, get them in school, get them reading instead of rapping, get them building each other up, is not the enemy. … Some folks are tricky. They will try to make you choose between Malcolm and Martin. Don't you let them. … And they are not going to make me choose between Minister Jackson and Minister Farrakhan. When Jesse is right, he's my friend; when Louis is right, he is my friend. When Jesse is wrong, he is still my friend; when Louis is wrong, he is still my friend. You don't give up a friendship because you have a disagreement. That ain't no friend!" Except for the tenderness toward Farrakhan, this is reminiscent of Barack Obama's legendary Philadelphia speech: everybody is somewhat right; loyalties are unshaken by philosophies; differences are distractions in an hour of crisis. I do not doubt that the life prospects of African Americans in the inner cities constitute an hour—no, an era—of crisis, an American disgrace. I see why hopeless people are tempted by the social benefits of fascism, but I do not see why they succumb to the temptation, because nothing will determine their way through life more than what they believe, and Farrakhan's beliefs doom them to isolation and despair.

Is pride everything? What has race to do with truth? Is it really so hard to choose Martin over Malcolm? Anyway, Wright's tribute to Farrakhan's service to black literacy is vitiated by an extraordinary riff in another sermon in the series, called "Faith in a Foreign Land," in which he denounces the usurpation of African traditions by "Babylonian," or Western, traditions in the education of "exiles," or African Americans: "These exiles became schooled in Babylonian literature, from *Beowulf* to Virginia Wolfe [sic], and their heritage was wickedly wiped away from the tissues of their memory banks. They became skilled in Babylonian philosophy from Descartes to Meister Eckhart, from Immanuel Kant to Jean Paul Sartre, from existentialism to nihilism, from the dialectical materialism of Karl Marx to the *wissenschaftlichkeit* [sic] of Martin Heidegger." This whole passage is a little sic. To mock Shakespeare, in a black church in Chicago, as "Babylonian Shakespearean literature"—*that* is nihilism. To exclude young African Americans from the mental ambition represented by such books is to defeat them. I first heard the preaching of Jeremiah Wright in 1989. The sermon was called "Premature Autopsies," it was written by Stanley Crouch, and it appeared on a powerful record by Wynton Marsalis called *The Majesty of the Blues*. In that sermon Wright lauded "the slow, painful development demanded of serious study." They were sterling words, but they were not the reverend's own.

But I have the pulpit now, so quiet down, brothers and sisters, and listen up. Our text for this morning's homily is the Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Baba Bathra 12a, wherein it is stated: "Rabbi Yohanan said: From the day the Temple was destroyed, prophecy was taken away from prophets and given to children and to fools." And there is more in the same unenraptured vein: "words of prophecy" is a rabbinical euphemism for nonsense, and in the age after prophecy, which is our age, "a wise man is preferable to a prophet." I cite these counsels of downward metaphysical adjustment because I am weary of being told that fevered demagogues such as Wright are "prophetic." If he is a prophet then I am a sibyl. There is no more empty or abused word in contemporary American theology than "prophetic." It hallows all kinds of absurdities and calumnies. Is it prophetic to proclaim that the government loosed AIDS upon the black community? If so, it is false prophecy.

Yet here is Cornel West, camp follower of all false prophets, including Wright: "The distinctive features of prophetic activity are Pascalian leaps of faith in the capacity of human beings to transform their circumstances, engage in relentless criticism and self-criticism, and project visions, analyses, and practices of social freedom." Or more concretely, "populist, feminist, trade-unionist, socialist, or Red, Green, and Black politics." What Bible does this son of man read? But contemporary prophecy, you see, is another name for the left. The equally countercultural wrath of John Hagee or Pat Robertson is not "critique." Whereas Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, Angela Davis, James Cone, Audre Lorde, Maulana Karenga—they are prophets all. Was prophecy ever so easy? An anti-Petraeus piece in *The Nation*, a jibe at the Patriot Act on Bill Maher, a rant at the National Press Club, and you are vatic. West also includes himself in the swelling population of the seers: in the eighth century B.C.E., Amos declared that he was neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet, but in the twentieth century C.E., Cornel West declared, in the titles of two of his own books, that he is himself prophetic. Progressivism and the ego: now there is a subject! Sure, there are features of the prophetic temperament that Wright and the other Jeremiahs share—the unceasing excitation, the wild hyperbole, the fantastic promise of total transformation, the impervious radicalism, the imputation of personal election; but these are features of style. What distinguished the ancient prophets (if you believe these things) is that they enjoyed direct access to the godhead. Even their universal vision of social justice owed its authority to a supernatural revelation. But to whom do our prophets speak, except to each other and Bill Moyers? So praise the Lord, because He does not speak to us, so that we may not be intimidated in the use of our minds, and have a nice week.

Leon Wieseltier

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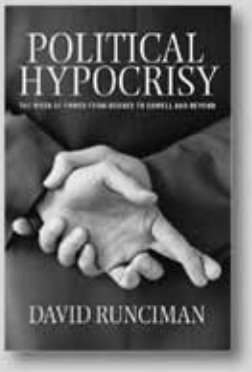

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